






Robin Clayton

Hakted School.

8, years 1920.



Stories of the King

by
James Baldwin

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BALDWIN'S STORIES OF THE KING.

W. P. 9

FOREWORD

FOR more than a thousand years the tales and romances which cluster round the name of King Arthur have been told and retold to successive generations of delighted hearers and readers. Each teller has related his story in his own way, preserving the original thread of narrative unbroken, and borrowing more or less from his predecessors, but giving to the whole a color and setting adapted to the intelligence and tastes of his particular audience. Thus the Welsh bards of the tenth century repeated certain of the romances in such manner as to appeal most strongly to the minds and feelings of their countrymen. The French poets of a later time put these romances into a different form and invented new ones for the amusement of the fashionable people of their day. A scholarly Englishman of the fifteenth century collected all the King Arthur legends he could find and rewrote them for the entertainment of the lords and ladies whom he knew. A poet laureate of the nineteenth century selected a few of the most pleasing romances and from them produced the *Idylls of the King* for the perpetual delight of minds mature and poetically inclined.

The stories of the King which are here presented have likewise been derived from many sources, Welsh, French,

German, English. On the one hand, the author has not held strictly to any authority; on the other, when occasionally some phrase or expression of a former narrator has seemed the best that could be used, he has not hesitated to appropriate it—for so even the greatest of his predecessors has done. And also, like those who have gone before him, he has tried to adapt the entire work to the tastes and understanding of his readers—the young people of the twentieth century.

To repeat all the romances of the King and his knights would require the writing of a multitude of volumes. Here, therefore, the author has endeavored no more than to combine in a connected narrative the most interesting events in Arthur's life and in the lives of his best knights; and while omitting those subjects which bar the older versions from immature readers, he has related in twentieth-century English those stories which will most vividly portray to his youthful audience whatever was noblest and most admirable in knighthood. To quote from Sir Thomas Malory:—

“Herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, hate. Do after the good, and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown.”

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STORIES OF THE KING

STORY THE FIRST

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

IN the days when men lived without law there was a king in Britain whose name was Uther. The home of this king was a gray old castle perched high on a rocky hilltop by the shore of the sea. Grim and dark and lonely, it lifted its one strong tower above its massive walls and frowned savagely down upon all the country round. On three sides of it lay a wild and wooded land where no man could dwell in safety; on the fourth were rugged white cliffs against which the sea waves were forever beating.

Old King Uther had lived long and had done many valiant and wicked deeds. He had utterly crushed his enemies. He had made his name a watchword of fear. Among all the petty kings and robber chiefs of Britain there was none who dared attempt to withstand him. He was the overlord, and all others were his vassals.

But now the time had come for him to die. In his strong room in the castle tower he lay moaning and wailing, and no friend stood by to smooth his pillow or try to lessen his pain. His knights and servants had forsaken him. "How long he is in dying!" they said; and they made riot in his halls, and rejoiced because his reign was ended.

The night was dark and wild. The rain was falling. The wind whistled and shrieked in every nook and corner of the old castle. The thunder muttered and rolled. The lightning gleamed fearfully among the clouds.

"Ah, me!" moaned the unhappy king; "ah, that I should die and leave no heir to be overlord of this lawless land!"

Suddenly a flash of lightning lit up the room with wondrous splendor, and Uther saw two men standing by his bedside. He knew them, for both had served him well for more than fifty years, and much of his kingly power had been gained through

their aid. In the glare of the storm they stood there, silent and motionless, a strange but well-mated pair. Their forms were bent. Their faces were wrinkled and gray. Both were very old, but one was much older than the other.

"Have you come at last?" muttered the king, vainly trying to raise his head. "What news do you bring? What can you do to save me?"

"King Uther," answered the younger of the men, "the news is the same that comes once to every man—prepare to die. No power of ours can save you."

"And is this all that your magic is worth? Where are your spells and enchantments? Oh, Merlin, must they fail when I need them most?" feebly moaned the king.

"Nothing can save a man from his doom," answered Merlin. "Death comes to kings as surely as to other men."

"Ah, me!" repeated Uther; "ah, me, that I must die and leave no heir to rule this lawless land!"

"An heir there is," said the elder of the two men; "but an heir of whom you know nothing."

"Who? Where—where?" cried the king, suddenly springing up in his bed.

"He is near at hand," answered Merlin, putting him gently down. "Lie still, King Uther, and

while you remain here and wait your doom, we will go forth and meet the heir."

Again the lightning gleamed on wall and tower and dying king—and Uther was left alone. He lay back quietly upon his pillow, listening to the rain, and waiting for the end.

The two old men went down the tower stairs and through the great courtyard. They passed out by way of the postern gate and down the steep pathway that led to the shore of the sea. With sure feet they picked their way through the darkness, guided only by the sound of the waves. At length they stood at the bottom of the cliff where the surf dashed white against the rocks, and the sea rose and fell in mighty undulations. As they stood with their faces lifted toward the drifting clouds, they seemed like creatures of another world come down in the darkness and the storm.

"At midnight, did you say, Master Bleys?" inquired Merlin.

"Yes, my son," was the answer. "At the stroke of twelve he comes. I have waited two hundred years for this hour."

"And I, too, have waited long," said Merlin. "It was you who taught me the mystery of magic and the hidden lore of the ages. With you I have read the stars and have delved into the secrets of the un-

known. And now, with you I hail the hour wherein our hopes will be blessed."

Then old Bleys spoke again. "For two hundred years," he said, "I have seen the world growing worse and worse. Men have become wickeder every day. Violence has ruled instead of law, and there has been no one to help. But I, alone among all men, have had hope. For, well known to me is the ancient promise that a king will surely come to change the old order and to establish truth and justice in the land. And soon I shall see him."

"Hark! hark!" cried Merlin. "The new day is at hand."

From the tower high above them came the sound of a bell pealing the hour of midnight.

"See! see!" said old Bleys, pointing upward, "the dawn is breaking."

As he spoke the storm suddenly died away, and high above the angry sea a wondrous sight appeared. For there, riding in the clouds, was a ship of fire, with dragon beak and sails of flame, and men and women in golden armor walking on her deck. Then, quicker than the lightning's flash, the vision vanished and was seen no more. But, overhead, the peaceful stars twinkled in the summer sky; and below, the sea lay calm and smooth as though no storm had disturbed its sleep.

"We have beheld the token," said Bleys. "The King is surely coming."

Far away on the horizon a line of light appeared trembling on the water. It came rapidly nearer, a wave of the sea capped with flame. It broke gently against the shore and vanished. Then came another fiery wave, and then another and another, each brighter and mightier than the one before it. The two men stood silent, watching and counting until the ninth wave appeared.

It came like a mountain of flaming water, and out of it issued the sound of voices as of a great choir singing in a church. Nearer and nearer it came, louder and sweeter grew the song, and oh, wonder of wonders! — the watchers saw that upon the crest of the wave a naked babe was sleeping. Then Merlin rushed fearlessly into the sea and caught the babe in his arms.

"It is the King! It is the King!" he cried; and the mighty breaker dashing over him wrapped him as in a sheet of flame. The next moment there was a great calm, and he carried the child, awake and smiling, to the shore.

"It is the King!" cried old Bleys. "My eyes have seen him! Let me now depart in peace."

"The new order has begun," said Merlin. "Here is Uther's heir."

Then, with the child in his arms, he began to climb the narrow pathway to the summit of the cliff; and old Bleys, with bowed head and beaming face, followed him.

When they came to the gate of the castle, they paused. They heard the reveling of the knights in the great hall, and shouts of rejoicing in the courtyard; and they knew that King Uther was dead.

"These men must not see us," said Merlin. "They would destroy the child, for they want no heir to Uther's kingdom."

"You must keep him hidden," said old Bleys. "No one must know of him till he is old enough to win that which is his own. Then you must bring him forth and declare him the rightful king of Britain."

"That I will do," answered Merlin, as he wrapped the babe in the warm folds of his cloak. "That I will assuredly do."

"Let me look upon his face once more, and then I will go my way," said old Bleys.

In that midnight darkness none but a magician could have seen the smiling face of the child pillowed upon Merlin's bosom. Old Bleys bent low before him and gazed lovingly into his eyes. Then he turned away and went tottering into the gloom, never to be seen again by men.

And Merlin, bearing his precious burden, strode down the hill and into the savage wood, keeping his face turned westward. Men say that he had the power of changing his form and of flying through the air, as all wizards do. Be this as it may, the morning dawn found him far away among the forest hills of Lyonesse, beyond the headland which men now call Land's End.

At the rising of the sun the wizard paused. He looked around him as though seeking for some expected sign or token. On every side stood giant oaks with spreading branches and sturdy trunks lifting themselves skyward. Far above, in the yellow light of the early day, an eagle was circling with motionless wings and screaming to its mate.

"This is the place," said the magician. "Here my journey ends."

With tender care he made a bed of leaves and moss at the foot of an oak. Then, with a gentleness not in keeping with his rugged face, he laid the naked babe thereon.

"Fear not, my little King," he said. "No evil shall befall thee here. No rude beast or ruder man shall do thee harm. Rest, rest and sleep. I will watch over thee, and some day we shall meet again."

The child looked up and smiled; and the wizard vanished in the gray fog of the morning.



(15) THE WILD CREATURES OF THE WOODS CAME TROOPING

Then out from their hiding places the wild creatures of the woods came trooping to the spot where lay the baby King. For the circling eagle had told them of his coming, and they, forgetting their hunger and their fear and their savage nature, hastened thither to see and reverence him.

The mother wolf with her little ones around her, the wily fox, the timid hare, the shambling bear,—all the beasts of the forest came. They sat in a peaceful ring about the great oak, while the child in their midst held out its little naked arms and smiled. And among the branches overhead, the robins, the linnets, all the singing birds, assembled to warble their welcome to the little stranger.

It so happened that, on that same morning, Sir Ector, the knightly lord of Lyonesse, was walking in the woods adjoining his castle. At his side trudged little Kay, his only son, stumbling and laughing, and chattering like a magpie.

“Is this my birthday, father? And am I just five years old?”

“Yes, my child,” answered the father, stooping to lift him over a fallen tree. “This is your birthday, and you are five years old.”

“Oh, I am so glad!” said little Kay. “And the birds are glad, too, father. Hear how they sing!”

Both stopped to listen. Never had Sir Ector heard such music. The whole forest seemed to ring with it.

"Surely, this is wonderful," he said to himself; and with little Kay clinging to his finger he hastened toward the spot where the feathered songsters appeared to be gathered.

As he pushed his way through the underbrush, however, the music ceased. The birds flew frightened from the branches of the oak, and the beasts slunk away, unseen, to their well-hidden lairs. But Ector, looking around, saw the naked babe lying on its bed of leaves and holding out its little hands. So great was his surprise that he could not speak; but Kay, in great glee, ran forward, crying: "See, father, we have found a baby! He shall be my brother."

Sir Ector stooped and lifted the babe gently in his arms. As he did so, he saw that around its neck was a golden chain, and on the chain was hung a tiny shield of gold inlaid with gems. He looked at the shield. It was scarcely larger than the nail of his thumb, and on it were engraved these words: —

Call his name Arthur

"Bless thee, Arthur," said Sir Ector, fervently. "Bless thee, my blue-eyed babe. I know not who thou art, but thou shalt be as my own son."

"And is he my own little brother?" asked Kay.

"He shall be as thy own brother," answered the knight.

Then, with the babe in his arms and little Kay clinging to the fringe of his cloak, he hastened back through the woods to his lofty castle.



STORY THE SECOND

THE RIDE TO LONDON TOWN

GREAT was the turmoil and fearful the day when it was told in Britain that Uther, the king, was dead. The mad riot that had begun in his castle spread through all the land and grew in strength and madness as it spread.

“There is no king,” said the false knights, “let every man do that which he can.”

Then they fought among themselves, and robbed their neighbors, and wasted the land with fire and sword. There was no safety for any man outside of castle walls. The poor and the defenseless hid themselves in the woods and lived like savage beasts, or died miserably for lack of food. Wolves in broad daylight ranged the fields in search of

prey; yet they in their savageness seemed no more savage than the men of the land.

From over the sea a host of heathen Saxons came; and these waged pitiless war upon the Britons. They pillaged the fields, destroyed the towns, and spared none. Fearful, indeed, were those days of violence and blood, and the hearts of the bravest were filled with despair. Where once had been green fields and happy homes, there were now vast tracts of wilderness, and the world seemed given over to brutish men and savage beasts.

Yet all this while, Sir Ector, the blameless knight, lived in peace in his secluded mountain home. Deep in the solitude of the woods, his well-built castle was safe from robber foes, and its inmates knew little of the terror and turmoil that reigned around them. Gentle and true, the dearest aim of Sir Ector was to train his boys, Kay and Arthur, to a noble manhood; and all his days and nights, were given to the accomplishment of that aim.

His heart had indeed gone out in fatherly love to the child whom he had found in the forest.

"Here is another son for you," he had said to his good wife, Lady Florimel, as he met her at the door on that fateful morning.

And little Kay had added, "He is my own dear brother."

And Lady Florimel had taken the blue-eyed waif in her arms, and, kissing him, had said: "Welcome, princely stranger! Thou shalt be our own child, and no man nor woman shall ever say or think that thou art otherwise."

Thus had the child Arthur found a home and loving parents and all the tender care that was needful to his young life. Days passed and years, and he grew into a slender and graceful lad, the joy and pride of Sir Ector's household. He was trained in all the duties and accomplishments which men of his rank needed to know and practice. He learned to ride and swim, and to run long distances without tiring. He learned to hunt wild beasts in the mountain forest. He became skillful in the use of the long bow; and he could wield the sword deftly and hurl the heavy lance with precision and force. But of those qualities of mind which go to the making of a noble man—as honor, truth, courage, gentleness—he had no need to be taught, for he had always possessed them.

In the same high school of knighthood, young Kay was also trained. And the heart of Sir Ector swelled with pride as he looked upon his two sons and saw how comely they were, and how unspoiled by contact with lawless men.

One evening on their return from a ride in the

forest, Kay suddenly leaped from his horse and stood in the gateway, barring Sir Ector's entrance.

"A boon, father!" he cried. "I pray you, grant me a boon."

"Indeed," answered the old knight, "you shall have a boon if you ask not too much. For you have earned some favor to-day. You have met and overthrown a robber, you have rescued a child from the jaws of a wolf, you have given your cloak to a friendless beggar, and you have gone hungry in order that others might be fed. The young man who does all these things in a single afternoon is not unworthy of a boon. Speak out, my son, and tell me what is your wish."

"Father, can you not guess?" said Kay, standing very straight and looking very proud.

"How should I know your secret thoughts?" answered Sir Ector. "Name the boon that you crave."

"Think a moment," said Kay, "and you will remember that to-morrow is my birthday. To-morrow I shall be of age. I have been your page and your squire, and for twenty-one years I have been your son. What boon do you think I ought to crave most heartily?"

"The honor of knighthood, my son," said Sir Ector. "You are worthy of that gift, and to-mor-

row you shall have it. To-night you shall keep vigil in the chapel, standing before the altar with your bared sword. In the morning you shall be made a knight."

"I thank you, father," said the young man. "I shall ever strive to be worthy of the honor which you have promised."



So, on the morrow, amid the blare of trumpets and the rejoicing shouts of those who loved him, young Kay knelt down before his father and was dubbed a knight.

"Arise, Sir Kay," said Ector, "and go forth to manly duties. Be brave, act nobly, love the truth,

protect the weak, help the needy, seek no selfish aims. Thus thou hast promised and sworn. See that thy knighthood remains untarnished."

One day not long thereafter, a visitor arrived at the castle. He was not a stranger, for during the past fifteen years he had been a frequent guest in Sir Ector's halls. He was old and wrinkled — a wandering harper, famous for his wisdom and skill, and welcome everywhere.

"You should have come a week earlier, friend Merlin," cried Sir Ector, "for then you would have had better cheer. My son Kay has just come of age, and we have been rejoicing because he is made a knight. It is a pity that you were not present."

"You have another son, have you not?" queried Merlin.

"Yes, indeed," answered Sir Ector, "and in five years he, too, will be of age."

"I shall certainly be present at his knighting," said Merlin.

That evening, sitting in the great hall with his host, the harper-wizard told many a story of the fearful doings in Britain since the death of old King Uther.

"Sad, sad is the day," said he, "for the people are without a leader. One might liken them to

sheep without a shepherd, were they themselves less wolfish. But some of the better among them are longing for a king and are looking for a man who is strong enough to be overlord of the country."

"God grant that they may find him," said Sir Ector, fervently.

"The news from London Town," continued Merlin, "is hopeful, for it points to the finding of such a man."

"How is that?" queried Sir Kay. "Pray tell us all about it, for any news from London Town is good news."

"The news is this," answered Merlin. "There is to be a tournament in London on the day which is called New Year's. Many petty kings will be there, and many noblemen and knights. There will be jousting and feats of arms such as the world has never seen. Many a young man will win fame by his deeds in that tournament; and if any one is worthy to become overlord of Britain, I sincerely hope that he will then and there make himself known."

Sir Kay could not sleep that night. The thought of the tournament at London haunted him. He wished that he could go there and take part in it. Why should he live idle in his father's castle when there was so much to be done and won elsewhere?

Was it not the duty of every young knight to seek adventures wherever adventures could be found? How else could he prove himself worthy of his knighthood?

In the morning he said to Sir Ector: "Father, I have made up my mind to go to London. I wish to take part in the great tournament on New Year's Day. Give me your blessing, and let my brother Arthur go with me as my squire."

"My son," cried the old knight, "I will do all that you ask and much more. I will ride to London Town with you, taking all our fighting men along, that we may appear with honor among our equals."

It was a great day in Sir Ector's castle when he and Sir Kay with their squires and men-at-arms set out for London. Their well-polished arms flashed in the morning sun as they mounted their steeds and rode lightly forth from the high-towered gate. From the windows and balconies smiling but tearful faces looked down, and cheerful voices bade them god-speed on their perilous journey. The trumpets sounded, white hands waved adieus, strong voices shouted good-by, and the little band galloped away through the dew-wet woods.

"To London Town! to London Town!" Sir Kay repeated to himself as he led the way down the steep mountain path; and his hopes were of tourneys

and battles and of a strange city, far away, of which he knew nothing but the name.

"To London Town! to London Town!" sang Arthur, the young squire; but his heart was sad, and he thought only of his sorrowing mother and of the dear, pleasant home which he was now leaving for the first time, and perhaps forever.

And where was this London Town?

It was a very great way off. It was somewhere far beyond the hill country and the great woods. But even Sir Ector had no clear idea of the distance or the place. They would ride eastward and a little northward, and as they rode they would inquire the way.

Day after day they journeyed through tangled wilds and along pathways seldom trod. They left the rugged hills behind and traversed a land of marshes and gray swamps and wasted fields. They saw the ruins of many a hapless home. The smoke of burning hamlets and farmsteads rose far away on the misty horizon. At night, bale fires gleamed on the hilltops and told of the march of destroying foes. Sometimes in the green gloom of the woods a robber's stronghold frowned sullenly upon them. Sometimes the castle of a stanch-hearted knight who had weathered the storm opened its gates to them and welcomed them to its safe shelter.

"Is this the way to London Town?" they asked alike of knight and robber chief and famished churl. And some said, "Yes, you are on the right road," while others answered: "You have missed the path. Ride back and take another course."

Thus they rode onward in the sun and shadow of many a crisp day of autumn and early winter. Often they were challenged at river fords and at the gates of wayside fortresses. But when they answered, "We are on our way to the great tournament at London Town," they were bidden to ride onward in peace.

After a while they began to overtake other companies of armed men who were bound for the same place. Then they came into a highroad which, farther on, was thronged with all sorts of folk, on horseback and on foot, pushing forward toward the great town. At length, on a sunny noon, midway between Christmas and New Year's Day, they rode joyfully into famous London.

Close by the city gates was the broad field where the tournament was to take place. Already the grounds were crowded with the tents and pavilions of knights and noblemen who had come to be present at the contest. To Sir Kay and to Arthur, his young squire, the scene was bewildering. Accustomed only to the quiet of their remote mountain

home, they felt now as if they were being ushered into a new world wholly strange and unknown to them. The gay pavilions, with bright pennants floating above them, the brilliant trappings of the horses, the dazzling armor of the assembled knights, the shouting, the racing, the never ending tumult — what youth, beholding them for the first time, would not have been speechless with wonder?

As the little band of strangers from the West made their way through this scene of confusion and splendor, they attracted but slight attention. They rode slowly onward, Sir Ector leading the way. They rode down the long street by the riverside, pausing now and then to inquire for lodgings. Being but few in number and unused to the ways of others, they deemed it best to take up their quarters in the town rather than encamp, as so many were doing, on the open commons.

There were not many people on the street that day, for all who had leisure were gone out to see the sights. But as Sir Kay rode between the houses, soft eyes looked down from the windows, and maidenly voices asked, "Who is that young knight who sits his horse so nobly?" Then, as their gaze fell upon his squire, with his long yellow hair and sky-blue eyes, the same questioners sighed and said, "Ah! this is by far the noblest of the company."

Soon the little band approached an open square where there was a church with a tall steeple and many fair windows. As they drew near and uncovered their heads, as was Sir Ector's custom, they observed by the church door a four-cornered booth, quite small, but beautiful. It was covered with white silk and surmounted by a blue pennant embroidered with gold. Under the booth was a block of white marble, hewn smooth and square; and on the top of this block there rested an anvil of iron, a foot high and of great weight. But, strangest of all strange things, a sword of rare beauty and workmanship had been thrust quite through the anvil and was sticking there with the point on one side of it and the jeweled hilt on the other.

"What miracle is this?" cried Sir Ector, dismounting from his horse. Then seeing that five armed knights were standing guard by the booth, he asked them what it meant.

"We will tell you all that we know about it," they answered. "Early on Christmas morning as the Archbishop was saying mass in the church, this stone, with the anvil upon it, and the sword sticking in the anvil, suddenly appeared by the church door. The Archbishop and all who saw it were filled with wonder and cried, 'A miracle! a miracle!' Then one of the clerks, who is a learned man, saw that

some words were engraved in gold upon the blade of the sword. You also may see these words, and read them if you will."

"I see the words," said Sir Ector, "and they are most beautifully written. But my eyes being dim, I must ask you to tell me their meaning."

Thereupon one of the guards, pointing with his finger to each word of the golden inscription, read it aloud:—

**Whoso pulleth this Sword
out of this Stone and Anvil
is rightwise born
king of the Britons**

"Indeed and indeed, this is strange," said Sir Kay. "Has no one yet tried to draw it out?"

"Yes, a great many," answered the guard; "but no man has been able to stir it a hair's breadth. And now the Archbishop has proclaimed that he will in good time appoint a day when all the bravest knights in Britain may come and make trial of their skill and strength. Moreover, he has set ten of us to keep watch and ward over it, five by day and five by night, that no one shall deal foully with it. And we shall guard it with our lives till the right man comes."

Thanking the guards for their courtesy, Sir Ector

remounted and, with Sir Kay beside him, rode onward down the street, looking for an inn. They did not notice that Arthur and the other squires had tarried far behind, and therefore had failed to learn the history of the sword.

"Halt!" said Ector, drawing rein beside a long, low building that fronted on the street. "This must be the inn to which we were directed. It seems a goodly place and doubtless we may find shelter here until after the great tournament."

"Most certainly you may," said the innkeeper, who had overheard his words.

And soon the weary travelers from distant Lyonesse were comfortably housed in London Town.



STORY THE THIRD

THE PROMISE OF THE SWORD



VERY early on New Year's morning, Sir Ector rode out to the fields, and with him rode Sir Kay and Arthur, the young squire. The morning had scarcely dawned, and yet it seemed as though all the world had gathered there. Knights on horseback scurried hither and thither, reckless of the lives and limbs of the multitude. The air was filled with discordant sounds — the blaring of horns, the rattling of drums, the neighing of horses, the shouting of men, the clanging of arms.

On the high seats overlooking the lists, beneath canopies of silk and gold, the beauty and the chivalry of Britain were assembled. The fairest ladies of the land were there, each hoping that her own champion would win the prize. Kings were there —

King Lot of the Orkneys, King Ryence of Wales, King Uriens of ~~Core~~ and many another petty ruler greater in name than in power. Lords and nobles, also, were there, such as the misfortunes of those woeful times had spared. It was a company the like of which had never before assembled beneath the walls of London Town.

Sir Kay had already made the acquaintance of many of the visiting knights, and his name had been enrolled in the list of those who were to take part in the tourney. As he dismounted and strode here and there, accosting those whom he knew, he seemed a head taller than any other warrior in the field, and his well-built form was the admiration of all who saw him.

"See that handsome young giant from the West," said the ladies, one to another. "He has the bearing of a king."

Sir Kay could not help overhearing the words. Is it any wonder that he began to feel puffed up with pride?

He drew his sword from its scabbard. He thought he would take a look at its sun-bright edge ere he was called to remount and enter the lists. He glanced at the blade, and then in disgust and anger threw it upon the ground.

"This is not my sword," he cried to his squire.

"It is that worthless old brand which I gave to our groom. How could it have come in my scabbard?"

"You know it was quite dark when we left the inn," answered Arthur, "and in your hurry you must have picked it up instead of your own."

"Well, it is your fault," groaned Sir Kay. "You should have seen to it that I was properly armed. Now I shall win no honors to-day, but rather shame and disdain."

"Say not so, brother," said Arthur. "I will hasten back to the inn and bring your sword. It hangs in its place at the head of your bed."

"God bless you, Arthur," said the knight. "I know you are the best squire in all Britain."

The next moment Arthur was galloping with speed into the city. The long street was deserted. The shops were all closed. The house doors were shut. No man nor woman was to be seen. All had gone to the tournament.

It was not long until he reached the inn. He drew up in the courtyard and looked around. Not a soul was there. He called loudly, but no one answered. Then he dismounted and tried the door of the guest room.

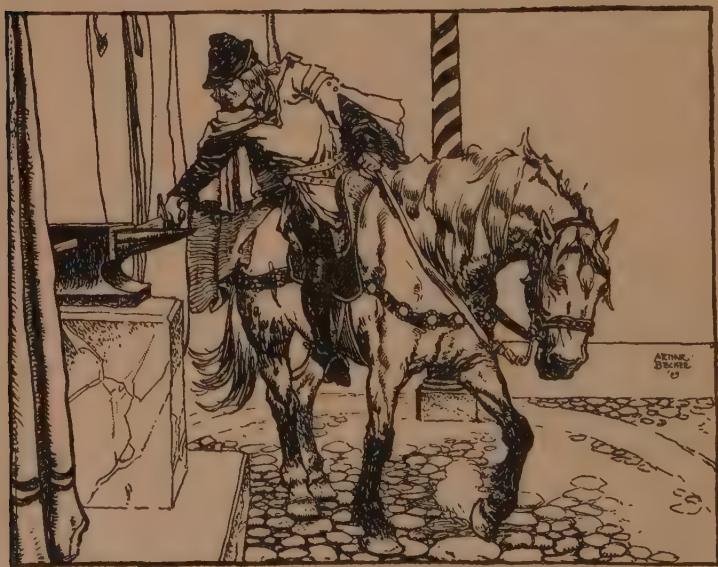
It was barred and bolted.

"I guess our landlady has gone to see the jousts," he said to himself.

He tried the kitchen doors. He tried the windows. They were fastened inside.

"The cooks and the chambermaids have followed the mistress," he said. "Alas, that I should have to return without my brother's sword. But there is no getting into this inn."

Suddenly his face brightened. He remounted quickly, straightened himself in the saddle, and gave



spurs to his steed. Down through the deserted street he galloped until he approached the great church in the open square. There he drew rein. Under the white booth by the church door there

was a block of marble. On the block of marble there was an anvil. And sticking in the anvil there was a sword. But the five knights who should have been guarding it were not there. They, too, had gone to see the jousts.

"I will take that sword," said Arthur, "and after my brother has used it, I will return it with thanks."

Thereupon he leaned over in his saddle and took hold of the hilt. He pulled quite gently, and lo, the blade came smoothly out of the anvil and left no mark nor scar behind. His eyes sparkled with delight as he again went galloping through the street. He held the blade in his hand and examined it.

"How beautiful!" he murmured softly to himself. "How supple it is, and how finely tempered! There is not another such sword in Britain."

Then he looked curiously at the inscription which it bore.

"I should like to know what that says," he mused. "If I could only read it, or if I could find some clerk to read it for me, I might learn something."

Then he buckled the sword carefully under his cloak, and hastened onward.

The trumpets had already sounded for the assembling of the knights. Sir Kay was riding impatiently back and forth by the city gate, and biting his downy lip with vexation. His heart had begun to fail him,

and yet he disliked the thought of withdrawing from the contest. When he saw Arthur speeding toward him from the city, he hurried to meet him.

"Have you brought the sword, brother?" he asked, half fearfully.

"Indeed, Sir Kay, I have brought you the best sword in Britain," answered the lad; and opening his cloak, he drew from beneath it the wonderful blade.

For a moment Sir Kay sat motionless and speechless in his saddle, so great was his surprise. Then reaching quickly forth, he took the sword and deftly slipped it into his empty scabbard. "Tell me, Arthur," he whispered hoarsely; "where did you get it?"

"I drew it out of the anvil by the church door," was the answer. "Your own sword I could not get, for the house was closed and no one was at home. But this is a far better one."

"Did any person see you take it?"

"Everybody had come out here to see the jousting, and no one saw me."

"Then say nothing about it, Arthur. But ride yonder to my father and tell him that I must needs speak with him about an important matter."

The trumpets were now sounding for the second time, and the heralds were about to proclaim the names of those who would take part in the contest,

when Sir Ector, anxious with fear, answered the summons.

"What is it, my son?" he asked. "Why have you not ridden into the field?"

"Softly, father," answered Sir Kay: Then drawing forth the sword, he held it up before Sir Ector's astonished eyes. "See! here is the sword of the stone. Therefore, am I not king of the Britons?"

"Oh, my son, my son!" cried the old knight. "Where did you get that sword?"

"Where should I get it," answered Sir Kay, "but from the anvil wherein it was stuck? And here is still the inscription engraved in gold upon its blade: 'Whoso pulleth this sword out of this stone and anvil, is rightwise born king of the Britons.'"

"And do you tell me," asked his father,—"do you tell me that you pulled it out of the stone and anvil?"

"How else could I have gotten possession of it?" answered Sir Kay. "The guards were away to see the jousting; there was no one to prevent."

"My son," said Sir Ector, solemnly, "I cannot understand this mystery. You are a knight and your father is a knight; but no royal blood flows in our veins. How can you be rightwise born king of the Britons?"

"Is it not so declared on the sword?" said Sir Kay.

"Come, my son," commanded Sir Ector, "let us ride to the church and see how you drew the blade from the anvil. Come, Sir Kay; and do you also come, Arthur."

"But we shall miss the tournament," objected Sir Kay, hanging back.

"Come!" repeated his father, in a tone which meant obedience.

So the three galloped back to the town, and down the long street to the church. There, surely enough, was the anvil resting in its place upon the block of marble; but of the sword there was no sign.

"Now, my son," said the old knight, "if you drew the sword out of the anvil, you surely can put it back again. Let me see you do so."

"But, father," said Sir Kay, "there is no mark nor scar to show the place whence it was taken."

"No matter about that. Put the sword back as it was," commanded his father.

Sir Kay, in desperation, placed the point of the sword against the anvil and pushed with all his might. But he made not even the slightest dent in the smooth surface of iron.

"My father, I cannot do it," he said.

"Well, then," said Sir Ector, "come with me into the church; and do you, Arthur, also come."

They entered the church.

A holy Book was there, chained upon the high table by the side of the altar.

"Put your right hand upon the Book, Sir Kay, and then tell me truthfully how you came by the sword," commanded Sir Ector.

"Sir," then answered the young knight, "I will tell you truthfully. I did not pull it from the anvil, but my brother Arthur — he brought it to me."

Then Sir Ector, turning to the young squire, said sharply, "How did you get the sword, Arthur?"

"I will tell you, father," answered Arthur. "When I rode back to the inn to fetch my brother's sword, I found the place closed and all the doors fast; for everybody had gone to the tournament. As I stood wondering what to do, I suddenly remembered this sword which I had seen as I rode past the church. I thought to myself how well it would serve my brother on the field of combat; and so I hurried hither and drew the weapon from its place and carried it to Sir Kay. I meant only to borrow it; and I would have asked the guards for it, but they were away."

"Do you know what is inscribed in the golden letters on the blade?"

"The inscription is very beautiful, father, but no one has told me its meaning."

"Take the sword, Arthur, and let us see if you can put it back in its place."

"That should not be a hard thing to do," said Arthur, as he placed the weapon's point against the smooth iron and drove it clean through the anvil. Then looking up, proudly, he said, "Now, father, let us see if you can pull it out."

Sir Ector seized the hilt with both hands and pulled. But the doughty weapon stuck fast in its place and moved not so much as a hair's breadth.

"It is not for me to do that wonderful deed," said the old knight. "But perhaps Sir Kay may now be able to perform it."

Sir Kay, abashed but still hopeful, took hold of the weapon and drew with all his strength. He braced his feet against the wall and tugged until his face grew red and his eyes seemed starting from their places.

"I cannot do it," he said at last. "The promise is not for me, and I shall never be king of the Britons."

"Now, Arthur, you may try," said Sir Ector.

Then Arthur grasped the hilt lightly, and lo, the sword slipped loosely out of the anvil, its keen edge flashing brightly in the rays of the sun. And Sir Ector, with bared head, knelt down on the ground before the astonished young squire; and Sir Kay knelt beside him.

“O my father and my brother!” he cried. “Why do you kneel to me?”

“We kneel to you, because you are our king,” was the answer. “For the inscription on the sword declares that only the rightful king of the Britons can do the miracle you have done.”

“But it pleases me not,” said Arthur. “How can I be king while my father and my brother are only subjects?” And he took them by the hands and raised them up.

“I am not your father,” cried Sir Ector; “and this is not your brother. Your birth and lineage are unknown to me.”

“Not my father? Not my brother?” cried Arthur, the tears gushing from his eyes. “Alas, that this thing should happen and you should deny me.”

Then, sobbing aloud, he thrust the sword back into the anvil until half of the inscription was buried in the cold iron.

“Stay thou there, mischief-maker!” he cried. “I would rather have my father and my brother than be a dozen times king of the Britons.”

Then Sir Ector took him by the hand and told him the story of his childhood. He told him how they had found him, a helpless babe, at the foot of an ancient oak on the mountain side; and how all the birds of the forest were sitting in the branches

and singing their welcome. Then he showed him the chain of gold and the tiny shield, and repeated to him the inscription, "Call his name Arthur."

And Arthur, as he listened, became more and more bewildered, and more and more overwhelmed with surprise.

"Alas! alas!" he cried. "For now I shall lose not only my father and my brother, but the dear lady, my mother, who kept me so tenderly and nourished me as her own! But if, indeed, it is God's wish that I be king of the Britons, I will do my duty, and that right faithfully. And you may ask of me anything that you choose, and I will not fail you."

"I shall ask of you only one thing," said Sir Ector, "and that is not for myself, but for your brother."

"Pray, tell me what it is," said Arthur.

"It is this," answered the old knight. "I would that when you become king, you will make Sir Kay your seneschal, to be your chief man in peace and war."

"That I will do," cried Arthur. "I promise it to you and to him. So long as I live and have my kingdom, there shall be no other seneschal than Sir Kay. And I promise an office to you also, dear Sir Ector. Guess what it is."

"You must tell me, my lord, for I am poor at guessing."

"Well, then, it is this: You shall be the king's father, and your dear wife shall be the king's mother. And when speaking to me, you must not address me as 'my lord,' but always as 'my son.'"

With talk like this the three allowed the morning hours to pass. They forgot the great tournament. They forgot even that they were in London. They forgot everything but the miracle of the sword and the change that was coming in their lives.

At length, however, as the street began to throng with people coming home from the jousts, they arose and returned to the inn. Then, a little later in the day, they went together to the Archbishop and told him all that had happened.

"If what you say be true," said the Archbishop, "there is but one explanation to be given. This young man Arthur is he whom God has set apart to be our king. Nevertheless, the nobles of the realm will not consent to it without due proof. I will therefore summon all those who have an interest in the matter to come to the church on Twelfth-tide at the rising of the sun. Then those who wish to make further trial of the sword may do so, and I pray God that he will show us the one whom he has chosen."

“Let us keep our counsel to ourselves,” said Sir Ector, “and let no one say aught concerning what has happened to-day.”

So Sir Ector and Sir Kay tarried quietly at their inn, and Arthur was his brother’s squire as he had been before.

And when the Archbishop’s proclamation was made known, many of the knights and nobles who had come to the tournament decided to stay in the city until after Twelfth-tide. The wondrous sword still remained fast in the anvil as though it had never been disturbed. And the ten knights kept guard over it continually, five by day and five by night.



STORY THE 'FOURTH

THE WINNING OF THE CROWN

RIGHT merrily rang the bells at the dawning of Twelfth-tide. Knights and noblemen arose and looked out at the wintry sky, and grumbled—the morning was so cold. A few of the most hardy girded on their swords and strode out into the frosty street and thence to the church. But the greater number preferred to stay indoors where the fires blazed and there was promise of warmth and a jolly day.

“What do we care about the sword which sticks in that anvil?” they said. “It is all a trick of the Archbishop’s. There is not a man in Britain who can pull it out. Little glory will any one win by tugging at cold iron on such a morning as this.”

The Archbishop, clad in his white robes, stood at

the door of the church. He lifted his hands to heaven and prayed:—

“O God, show us this day the man who is right-wise born king of the Britons.”

Then in a loud voice he called upon all who were present and wished to try the adventure of the sword to come forward unarmed and take their places kneeling in front of the silken pavilion.

“It is a rare good chance to prove one’s birth-right,” said Sir Baudwin of Wales; and leaving his arms with his squire, he came and knelt upon the icy ground.

After him came Sir Kay, and Sir Ulfus of Cornwall, and Sir Brastias of the Marshes, and an unknown knight who called himself Chief of a Hundred Horsemen. And by the side of these there knelt well-nigh a score of barons and men of high degree whose names have been forgotten.

When all these had taken their places according to their rank, a few others came who had not yet been invested with the honor of knighthood—squires, young men claiming kinship with former kings of Britain, and even one or two bold fellows from among the common people. For the Archbishop had proclaimed that no person should be debarred from the contest on account of his birth or condition of life.

Sir Baudwin was the first to make the trial. He seized the sword hilt firmly with both hands. He braced his knees against the block of marble. He threw his weight backward and tugged with all the power of his strong arms. His breath came short and quick, and the sweat oozed in drops from his forehead. Yet the weapon still stuck fast in the anvil, and the anvil was not budged from its place.

"It is very plain that I was not born to be a king," said the knight at last, as he let go of the sword and went to stand by the Archbishop in the church door.

Then Sir Kay made the trial. But he did it in a way so half-hearted and lifeless that the onlookers laughed in derision. "Have a care!" they cried; "the sword is sharp."

After him came Sir Ulfius, and, one by one, the other knights and noblemen in their order. Each strove more or less manfully according to the faith that was in him. Some scarcely did more than touch the cold hilt, for they knew in their hearts that they were not worthy of success. Some, in sheer bravado, put forth all their strength, boasting that they would not be outdone in any contest. The Chief of the Hundred Horsemen went so far as to try to break the weapon short off below the hilt; but no power of hand or arm could mar that well-tempered blade.

Soon only a few squires and unknown men remained kneeling on the ground and waiting to make the hopeless trial.

"What sort of fool's game is this?" cried some of the defeated knights. "Are we here to contend with boys? Out upon this silly business!" And with that, they would have driven the squires away had it not been for the Archbishop.

"This is not a contest of strength," said the holy man. "It is not even a trial of skill. It is a test of kingly birth, a means through which God will make known to us the man whose right it is to be overlord of the Britons. Every man, therefore, who feels himself worthy is admitted to this contest."

At length it was young Arthur's turn. He arose and went lightly forward. Men held their breath when they saw him, he looked so kingly and brave. Women and girls, standing in the church, whispered, "Who is he with the wonderful eyes?"

He laid his right hand gently upon the stubborn hilt. Instantly the glorious blade loosened itself in the anvil. The next moment he drew it forth and brandished it aloft, a slender shaft of steel gleaming in the air like a line of living fire.

At first those who saw were dumb with wonder. Then a great shout of mingled joy and displeasure rent the air, and was echoed from the house-tops.



ARTHUR '09.
JECHE.

"Hail to the King!" cried Sir Baudwin, kneeling before the victorious Arthur.

"A trick! A trick!" cried others. "It was not done fairly. You cannot do it a second time."

Silently and with ease, the young man thrust the sword back into the anvil, and then silently and with ease drew it forth again.

"Oh, that is very simple," said the Chief of the Hundred Horsemen. "It is done by a cunning twist of the wrist. Anybody can do it."

Arthur made no answer, but again returned the blade to its place in the anvil, and then went to seek Sir Ector in the porch of the church.

"Perhaps there are knights here who would like to try that cunning twist of the wrist," said the Archbishop. "If so, they have our permission."

The Chief of the Hundred Horsemen strode forward, and for the second time tugged to withdraw the sword. But, no matter how he twisted, no matter whether he pulled gently or furiously, the blade held fast and was not moved. At last, white with rage, the chief gave up the contest and walked, muttering, away. Then a few others who fancied they had detected a trick, made likewise a second trial; but all were baffled as before.

"Now," said the Archbishop; "let the young squire come forward again. He has twice drawn

forth the sword in your sight. Let us see if he can repeat the act."

So Arthur again put his hand lightly upon the hilt, and the matchless blade leaped quickly from its place. Then, gently as before, he returned it to its anvil scabbard.

"My children," said the Archbishop, "God has heard our prayers. By a sign which none can mistake, he has shown us the man who is to be our king."

"Hail to King Arthur! Hail to the rightful king of all the Britons!" cried Sir Baudwin and Sir Kay, bending their knees and unsheathing their swords.

But others cried: "No! no! Never shall this boy be our king. He is only a squire from the far West. He is only the son of Sir Ector, and Sir Ector is nobody."

Very noisy they were, and very rude; and had not Sir Baudwin and Sir Kay stood bravely by Arthur's side, there is no telling what wicked deed might have been done. At length Sir Ector stood up by the church door and spoke.

"Harken to me, Britons," he said. "This young man is not my son, as you suppose. I know nothing of his parentage, but of this I am sure, that he is by birth the rightful king of our land." And

then he went on to tell how he had found the baby Arthur in the forest, and how the birds and the wild beasts had assembled there to do him honor. But when he had finished speaking, the Chief of the Hundred Horsemen laughed in derision and said:—

“Indeed, you have told us a pretty fairy story, and cunningly you have plotted with the Archbishop to make this boy our king. But we want no king, and never shall a stripling of unknown birth rule in this land.”

Then there was great confusion, and much loud talking and threatening; and only Sir Brastias of the Marshes was won over to the support of young Arthur. “Hail to the King!” he cried, as he leaped forward and stood with Sir Baudwin and Sir Kay. Swords flashed in the air, and a fierce fight would have followed had not the Archbishop raised his hands and called upon the knights present to have respect for the church and the holy ground whereon they were standing.

“But this boy shall not be our king,” they shouted.

“Well, then,” said the Archbishop, “since you are not satisfied with the result of the contest, you shall not be asked to abide by it. We will let matters rest as they are for a while, and will set another day for the contest when a greater number of

worthy knights may be present. The sword shall abide where it is, guarded still by the ten trusted knights whom we have chosen. Then on Easter Day, at sunrise, the trial shall be repeated, and he who is able to pull the weapon from the anvil and the stone, shall be proclaimed king and overlord of all Britain."

At this speech most of the knights applauded and were well pleased. But some, among whom were certain robber chiefs, declared they would have nothing more to do with the matter.

"We will have no more of this folly," they said. "We want no king." And they strode sullenly away, each to his own place.

Among all who had come to the church, only four — Sir Ector, Sir Kay, Sir Baudwin, and Sir Brastias — stood up for Arthur and hailed him as their king.

The winter days passed slowly, and Sir Ector with his friends and his retinue tarried idly at the inn. They formed a little court around Arthur, and almost every day some humble knight or sturdy commoner was added to the number of his supporters.

At length spring came suddenly with its beauty and its music and its budding promises. Brave men again girded on their armor and rode forth on pilgrimages and errands of duty; and lawless men

sallied out from their robber dens to pillage and slay and to carry terror throughout the land. Many noblemen and knights from various parts of Britain rode up to London, being called thither by letters from the Archbishop, saying that a king would be crowned at Eastertide.

The expected day dawned, with its flowers and its joy bells and its white processions, and all London awoke early to greet it. At the church an eager multitude assembled, and at sunrise the contest for the sword and the crown was renewed. One after another, the noblest men in the land approached and made trial of the virtue that was in them; but not one was able to loosen the wonderful blade. Last of all, young Arthur came. He laid his hand softly upon the hilt, and lo! the weapon leaped lightly forth as before.

"Now surely," said the Archbishop, "God has made it plain to us that this is he who shall be our king."

But again there was a great outcry. "It is a trick!" shouted those who had been defeated. "We will not have that fellow for our king. He is not of the royal race."

Then Sir Kay and Sir Baudwin, with fifty men behind them, rushed forward, crying, "Hail to King Arthur! Hail to him whom God has chosen!"

Swords were drawn, and the air resounded with sullen threats and loud words of defiance. The foes of Arthur were ten times the number of his friends, and had not the Archbishop again interfered, blood would have flown on that holy Easter morning.

"My children," he cried, raising his hands aloft and holding a crucifix before the eyes of the angry mob—"my children, this is neither the place nor the time for quarrelsome words or unholy combat. Since many of you are grieved at what has taken place to-day, we will count it all as nothing and set still another time for the settlement of this matter. Let every one depart in peace, and then at the feast of Pentecost let all return to put this question to another test. It may be that, at that time, God will point out to us the son of a king to be the overlord of our land."

Some of the disaffected knights objected. "We have had enough of this child's play," they said. "We shall make no further test except the test of strength."

The rest, however, agreed right readily to the Archbishop's plan, and all went into the church to join in the services of Easter morning. And at the altar there knelt around young Arthur fifty knights, honest and true, who had bound themselves to stand

by him and share his fortunes, whether for good or for ill.

Every day thereafter they rode together through the streets of London, their swords glittering in the sunlight, and their armor jingling to the music of their horse's hoofs. And at every public place they shouted, "Arthur is our king, and we shall have no other." But Arthur remained quietly at his lodging place with Sir Ector and Sir Kay.

Then came June and the day of the feast of Pentecost. The streets leading to the church were crowded with men and women of every degree, some riding, many walking, and all hastening to be present at the third great trial of the sword. In the churchyard and about the church door stood the foremost men of the time, and among them King Lot of the Orkneys, King Uriens of Gore, and others of lesser note. These had come hoping that one of their own number might, by some chance, bear away the sword and win the crown of Britain.

But when the Archbishop invited all who were worthy and able to come forward and make trial of the issue, the result was the same as before. Petty king and proud nobleman and boastful knight, all were alike baffled; for the weapon abode in its place and would not be loosened. Last of all, however, Arthur came and plucked the blade from its strange

scabbard and waved it aloft in the sight of all the people.

Then there arose a shout such as had never before been echoed from the roofs of London Town.

"Hail to King Arthur!" cried all the common people.

"Hail to King Arthur!" cried many among the nobles.

But the petty kings and the more lawless of the knights still held back, and said: "Never shall that boy be king of the Britons. He is not of any royal race. And who knows aught of his birth and parentage?"

Suddenly, at the door of the church, an old, old man appeared. So unexpectedly had he come that it seemed as if he had risen from the earth or perhaps had dropped down from the sky. He was wrinkled and gray and bent with years, but his eyes glowed with the wisdom of the ages, and his voice struck awe into the hearts of his hearers.

"Do you ask who knows aught of his birth and parentage?" he cried. "Behold, I know, and I will tell you. I am Merlin, sometimes called the enchanter. I was with old King Uther when he died, alone and forsaken, in his dark tower by the sea. On that very night as I stood looking out upon the stormy deep, a babe was carried to me upon the

crest of a wave and left at my feet. By all the signs that I had read in the stars and in the books of the wise, I knew that this child was to be that king of the Britons whose coming the prophets and bards of ancient times had foretold."

Then he went on to tell of the glorious visions he had seen on that eventful night and of the voices he had heard in the darkness. He told of his long journey into the mountain land of the West, and how he had left the babe lying beneath the oak. Then, in a loud voice, he shouted: "Hail to Arthur, our king! Out of the great deep he came; to the great deep he shall in time return."

Thereupon the people cried aloud: "Hail to Arthur, our king! Let him be crowned without delay."

And rich and poor knelt down and humbly begged his pardon for putting him off so long.

Then Arthur forgave them all, and even the knights who had been the most bitter against him. With bared head he entered the church, carrying in both hands the wonderful sword of the anvil. He laid it reverently upon the altar, and then knelt at the Archbishop's feet.

The Archbishop raised his hands in prayer. He took the sword and blessed it. Then with three gentle strokes, as was the custom, he gave to Arthur the honor of knighthood.

"Arise, Sir Arthur," he said; "be to the world evermore the pattern of courage, of truth, of gentility. May all men who shall hear of thee in after ages admire thee as the perfect type of manliness and honor, and may they see in thee the mirror of true knighthood. Arise, Sir Arthur, and be mighty to save Britain from her foes."

The trumpets sounded. The people shouted. Cries of rejoicing filled the church, and floated out into the town, and were echoed from the roofs to the trees, and from the trees to the hills, until they were heard all over the land. The Archbishop, taking Sir Arthur by the hand, led him to the high seat beside the altar, and there he crowned him king and overlord of the Britons.

"Hail! hail to Arthur, our rightful king!" shouted all the people, falling upon their knees.

Then Arthur, with his hands laid upon the Book, promised to be to his subjects a true king, and to deal honorably and justly in all things so long as he might live. And the lords of Britain, and the nobles who were present, knelt at his feet and promised to serve him faithfully as was their duty. Then the trumpets were sounded again, the great organ pealed forth its solemn music, and a choir of sweet voices sang a triumphal song for the new-made king.



STORY THE FIFTH

THE GREAT FIGHT AT CAERLEON

BEFORE the sun had set on the day of Arthur's crowning, the shadows of coming evil began to darken his pathway. For word was brought to him that six under kings with their followers had ridden sullenly out of the city and were planning to make war upon him. Foremost among these rebels were King Lot of Orkney, King Uriens of Gore, and he who was known as the Chief of the Hundred Horsemen.

"Great shame would it be," they said, "if this low-born boy should be permitted to rule over us. Never will we bow down before him. Never will we do him homage."

Thus with angry threats, they rode out through the city gates. They crossed the river Thames, and made their way into the land so lately wasted

by fire and sword. Then there flocked to them great numbers of unworthy knights and lawless men, and soon they were at the head of a mighty army, crying: "Down with the upstart Arthur! We will have no overlord to rule us."

Bravely and without delay, King Arthur summoned his warriors and marched out in pursuit of the rebels. By the side of the King rode his brother Sir Kay, and with them were Sir Baudwin and Sir Brastias and the good Archbishop wearing under his gown a coat of mail. Following these, in orderly array, rode a thousand young knights who had knelt at Arthur's feet and, with their hands in his, had sworn to be his men in war and peace. Right gallantly marched they down the streets of London and out through the city gates. Loudly sounded their trumpets, while their banners floated gayly in the breeze, and their sword hilts glittered in the rays of the sun.

"Hail to King Arthur!" they shouted. "There is no other king."

But where now were the foes who were so loudly breathing threats and defiance? Where now were King Lot and King Uriens and the robber chiefs who had gathered about them? These rebels were not minded to risk a battle in the open field and near the city of London. They withdrew in haste

toward Cornwall, and tarried not until they came to the fair town of Caerleon on the Usk. There they intrenched themselves behind strong walls and in a castle great and high which the Romans had built in former times.

Now, while King Arthur's hosts were still many leagues away, Merlin, the magician, came suddenly among the rebels at Caerleon. Whence he had come, and by what means he had entered the castle, no one could tell. Like a spirit rising slowly from the earth, he came silently and stood before King Lot and his fellows. His face was grave and stern, and his gray eyes gleamed strangely beneath his shaggy brows. The hearts of those who saw him were filled with awe, for they knew him and feared his power.

"Speak, wizard," cried King Lot. "Tell us your errand; for surely you bring us some message of weal or of woe."

Merlin raised his hand, and with his gaunt fingers pointed Londonwards.

"Lo, I see the King coming," he said. "I see him coming through the forest ways and the land which lawless men have wasted. He comes with power to subdue his foes. He comes to restore truth and justice in the world. Oppose him not, for you shall by no means prevail against him."

Then Lot, grown bolder, spoke up and said: "Why should we who are of kingly birth do homage to this beardless boy? Who knows aught of his parentage? By what right does he claim the overlordship of the Britons?"

"By right of worth and of heaven's decree," answered Merlin. Then he repeated the story of that wonderful night when old Uther died and Arthur came in glory out of the deep sea. And when he had finished, some wondered and were convinced, but King Lot and many others laughed him to scorn.

"You are a wizard and can do strange things," they said; "but never shall we believe that the waves of the sea have delivered a king into your arms."

"Believe or disbelieve as you will," answered Merlin. "I have warned you."

He ceased. There was a sudden flashing of fire as of lightning in the sky; a cloud of smoke filled the castle with darkness; and the magician vanished from sight.

Meanwhile, along the forest-bordered road, King Arthur advanced with his faithful warriors, marching upon Caerleon. While he was yet far away, his eyes, like those of Lynceus in ancient fable, saw clearly all that lay before him. The smallest rocks

upon the distant hills were plainly visible, as were also the blades of grass in the streets of Caerleon, the swallows nesting under the eaves of the houses, and the waters of the river Usk rippling in the sunshine. But the knights who rode with him saw only the trees by the roadside, the dust at their feet, and the rugged way before them.

"I see the gray tower of Caerleon," said Arthur. "I see the sentries on the castle walls. I see the courtyard, where horsemen ride to and fro with shields and swords and pointed spears. I see the six under kings feasting in the great hall. Ah, yes! and high above the gray tower and the ancient hills, I see the morning star shining in the clear depths of the sky."

"It is God's signal to you," said the Archbishop; "and he will give you the victory."

At length the forest was passed, the hill was climbed, and the hard march was ended. Below them the heroes saw the peaceful Usk and the old town of Caerleon with its massive walls and stately houses built long before by Roman conquerors. But the streets swarmed with a rabble of lawless men and faithless knights, and the banner of King Lot floated from the castle tower.

"Let us encamp here," said Arthur; and soon the hill was dotted with white tents, and the

fields were gay with many-colored banners. Then the knights of the King rode boldly forward, even to the gates of Caerleon, shouting defiance to their rebel foes. But the six under kings and their followers remained quietly behind the walls, biding their time.

Thus the day passed, and at night bright camp-fires glowed upon the hillside, while Caerleon lay dark and still by the sleeping Usk. The morning dawned, and suddenly shrill trumpet blasts awoke the echoes in field and town, starting the birds from their nests and the beasts of the woods from their hiding places. The gates of the city flew open, and forth from the gray castle rode the six under kings with their false knights and their following of lawless men. Forth, also, from that white encampment on the hillside, advanced King Arthur and his warriors, all eager for the combat.

So, in the open fields, the battle began. Fierce was the onset on either side. The hoarse shouting of the knights, the clanging of their armor, the thundering of their horses' hoofs, filled the air with a dreadful uproar. Then were heard the clashing of swords, the ringing of shields, the crushing blows of battle-axes, mingling with the groans of the dying and the triumphant cries of the victors.

At times the rebel host prevailed, at times the

King; and no one looking on could tell which was the stronger. Now, Sir Baudwin and Sir Kay and Sir Brastias, with might and main, would drive back their foes, cowering, even to the city gates; and now King Lot and his fellows, with rallying cries, would turn the tide again and carry the battle to the farthest edge of the bloody field. Thus the conflict wavered; but always at the front of the fight rode the young King, swift as a whirlwind, cheering his followers and terrifying his foes.

Suddenly, from over the crest of the hill a cloud was seen spreading itself across the sky. Then the roll of thunder was heard, deeper and mightier than the roar of the battlefield. The ground trembled. The air was afire with the blaze of the lightnings.

"Behold, the powers of heaven are on our side!" cried Arthur; and with a shout which echoed loud above the din of battle and the storm's uproar, he charged again upon his foes.

They swerved, they turned and fled, while Arthur's knights pursued them, hacking them with their red swords and strewing the earth with fallen men and steeds. Then Arthur shouted, "Hold! Hold, my men! The victory is won. Follow no farther, but let those escape who can."

So ended the great battle.

The trumpets sounded. The pursuers returned



and gathered around their chief. They marched triumphant into Caerleon.

“Bravely have you wrought for me this day,” said the King, “and I am right beholden for your loyalty and love.”

“O King,” they answered, “we nevermore shall doubt thee. For we have seen the fire of heaven come down upon thee in the battlefield, and we know that thou art he whom God has sent to be our lord and ruler.”



STORY THE SIXTH

THE RELIEF OF CAMELIARD

SO, for a time, King Arthur abode in Caerleon. The gray-walled town, so long oppressed by lawless men, rejoiced in peace. In the streets the patter of children's feet and the sound of happy voices were heard, as in the days of old. Men and women went about their work with smiling faces, for the banner of the King was unfurled above the castle gate.

The fame of Arthur's victory was carried far and wide, and nothing was talked of but his wisdom and his deeds of valor on the battlefield. But King Uriens and the Chief of the Hundred Horsemen, with those of their followers who had escaped, still rode through the land, destroying and laying waste. And they drew to them six other kings and many

robber chiefs, and Britain was again filled with terror and dismay.

*One day there came into Caerleon some strange knights, travel-worn and weary, who begged to be led to the King without delay.

"We have come," they said, "from Leodegrance, the king of Cameliard. For lo, he is beset on every hand by pitiless foes. On the one side the heathen Saxons are wasting the land; on the other, King Uriens, newly come with a horde of desperate men, is seizing castles and towns and giving all to the flames. Between these two foes Cameliard lies helpless, while the sky is black with smoke and the earth is red with blood.

"King Leodegrance has heard of you and of your victory at Caerleon. Therefore he has sent us to beseech your aid. 'Hasten, O young hero!' he cries. 'Help us, or we shall perish!'"

Then Arthur answered, "Who is this King Leodegrance that I should aid him? Is he one of those who promised to be faithful to me at my crowning? Or is he of those who cried out against me, declaring that I was lowly born and unfit to rule?"

"He is neither the one nor the other," answered the messengers. "He has been so hemmed in by foes that for twelve months he has not dared to stir out of Cameliard. He knows nothing of your

crowning. He has heard of you only as a warrior, brave beyond most men and fearless in fight. A few days ago, when he was told of the great battle here at Caerleon, he cried out, 'Who knows whether this young man be not the looked-for king who shall deliver Britain?' And then he bade us seek you and say to you, 'Hasten, O young hero, to the help of Cameliard! Help us, or we shall perish.'"

"I will think of the matter," said Arthur, "and in the morning I will give you my answer."

As he withdrew to his own chamber, Merlin came and stood before him.

"O King," said the wizard, "let me advise you. Take only thirty of your most trusted knights and ride to the help of Leodegrance. But tell him not your name, and let no one in Cameliard know who you are or whence you have come. I will ride with you and direct you, and you shall have victory and a great reward."

So, on the morrow, the King chose thirty of his most valiant men to go with him upon this new adventure. All were well mounted, with their shields before them and their lances in their hands. The trumpet sounded, the word of command was given, and the knightly band rode out of the gates and over the hills towards far Cameliard.

Taller by half a head than any of his comrades.

young Arthur took the lead ; but his armor was of the plainest sort, and neither on helm nor shield did he bear any sign of his high rank. People watching the heroes as they passed, and judging only by the richness of their arms, would have chosen Sir Ulfus, or Sir Brastias of the Marshes, or young Sir Bedivere, as their leader and king. But when Arthur spoke, or when he rode first and most fearlessly into the face of danger, he seemed to tower so far above all the others that those seeing him were sure to say, "This is the man."

So through the forest and the wild marsh lands the heroes fared with songs upon their lips and joy in their hearts. The messengers of King Leodegrance led them by the shortest pathways to the war-wasted fields of their master. The gates of Cameliard were opened to them, and they entered silently, with old Merlin at their head. King Leodegrance showed but little joy at their coming.

"I had hoped," said he to his counselors, "that the young prince at Caerleon would send an army to succor me, but I see here only thirty men. And who is this old man who rides with them? He looks more like a scholar than a warrior. Nevertheless, they are welcome. All friends are welcome when one has so many enemies."

The very next day King Uriens, the traitor, came.

He had with him a host of reckless men, false knights and robber chiefs and the scum of the land, and they encamped just outside of the city gates. They shouted defiance to Leodegrance. They hurled their spears over the wall. They shot their arrows far into the city. They challenged the king to lead out his fighting men and meet them on the field of battle.

But Leodegrance was helpless. His best warriors had been slain. His counselors had forsaken him. He had no army to lead to battle. He sat in his castle and bewailed his ill fortune. "All now is lost!" he said.

Then Merlin, with King Arthur and his heroes, besought him to open the gates and let them go out and give battle to King Uriens and his rebel host. But Leodegrance only moaned the more bitterly and said: "No; it is better that you remain within the walls to succor us. For if you go out, you will all perish in the fight."

Thereupon Merlin and the heroes mounted their steeds and stood at the fast-barred gates, waiting. They heard the shouting of King Uriens and his men outside. They cried, "Have patience but a little while. We will meet you in battle."

Then the mighty wizard lifted his hands and muttered a strange spell with uncouth words which

none could understand. He rode forward and lifted the huge gates of Cameliard upon his shoulders, while King Arthur and his knights rode bravely through. He muttered still another spell, and the gates fell back to their places, and unseen hands bolted and barred them fast as before.

“Now, on to the great victory!” he shouted.

“Never shall we return,” cried Arthur, “until we have subdued the foes of Britain.”

The heroes gave spur to their steeds and with poised lances rushed into the midst of the rebel host. Ah, then there was fighting, such as Britons had never seen before! Ah, then did Arthur prove himself worthy of the crown!

But there is no need that we follow him and his knights as they smote the robber chiefs and put them utterly to rout. There is no need to tell more concerning the great victory which was won that day—thirty men fighting against thirty thousand in the fields of Cameliard.

Soon the story was carried to every castle and every hut between Cameliard and distant Cornwall, and knights and fighting men came thronging to join themselves to King Arthur's band. These he led on to other and more famous victories. He smote the heathen Saxons from over the sea, and drove them hither and thither in wild dismay.

Twelve times they rallied and offered battle, and twelve times they were routed and overthrown. Twelve times did King Arthur lead his heroes into the fearsome fight, and twelve times did his loud voice stay pursuit and bid the victors spare their vanquished foes.

Then on a fair morning in summer, the heroes rode back to Cameliard. Right gayly did their tattered banners float in the breeze, and right merrily did their horses' hoofs keep time with the sounding trumpet and the rattling shields. At the gates King Leodegrance waited to welcome them to the city which their prowess had saved; and the watchmen on the walls cried: "Hail to the conquering heroes! Hail to the nameless knights who have delivered us from the spoilers!"

Then, as the heroes entered Cameliard, a troop of children went before them, scattering flowers, while on either side of the way choirs of young men and maidens sang songs of joy and victory. They rode onward through narrow streets, where wondering people looked out to see them pass. They rode onward, and while many eyes were turned towards the tall knight with yellow hair and dinted shield, none guessed that he was the king of the Britons.

At length they drew near the palace of Leodegrance, and Arthur, looking up, saw fair faces peer-

ing from the balcony. His heart stood still and a great trembling seized him; for among those faces was one, the fairest the world has ever seen—the face of the princess Guinevere. He would fain have



paused right there and looked long at that face, so full of heavenly beauty did it seem. But Guinevere, all unmindful of his gaze, gave him but a passing glance, while her eyes wandered in search of the young king, whom she supposed to be among the more richly attired heroes who rode in the middle of the procession.

That night there was rejoicing in Cameliard, and Arthur and his heroes were guests of honor in the halls of King Leodegrance. The torches flamed brightly beneath the rafters, and dance and song enlivened the passing hours. Lords and ladies, richly attired, came to offer greetings and thanks; and the hearts of the victors beat high with pride and joy.

"How shall we reward this young knight who has saved Cameliard from destruction and ourselves from death?" asked King Leodegrance.

"No reward is too great for him," answered his queen.

"No reward is too great for him," echoed his counselors. "Let him choose that which his heart desires most."

"It shall be so," said Leodegrance.

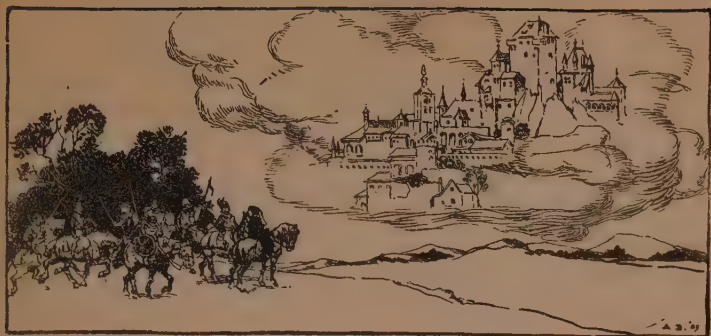
Then, speaking to Arthur, he said: "My noble friend and helper, without your aid our foes would have triumphed and our fair land would have become a desert. Our gratitude to you is great, and we would fain make some fit return to you. Is there any reward that you desire? If there is, you have but to name it and it shall be yours, even though it be my crown."

Then Arthur, his face beaming with joy and his heart glowing with pride, answered: "O King

Leodegrance, there is but one gift that I desire from thee. If I have indeed served thee well, I pray that I may have—”

At that moment, his eyes, looking upward, saw a glorious vision, and his tongue was unable to utter another word. For, standing by her father's side, was Guinevere, more beautiful than any star in heaven.

He paused, he stammered, he trembled violently; and Leodegrance, seeing his confusion, said: “’Tis well. At another time you may name your wish; for here is my daughter who has come to welcome and thank you.”



STORY THE SEVENTH

THE CITY OF DREAMS



LADLY would Arthur have tarried a long time at Cameliard, for the beauty of Guinevere had made prisoner of his heart. But that very night Merlin, the wizard, came to his chamber and bade him make ready to depart without delay.

“It is time for you to take possession of your kingdom,” he said.

So at the dawn, while Leodegrance and his household were asleep, the young hero, with his knights, rode out of the town. As he wended his way through the great forest, he dared not look back lest he should be tempted to return; and yet he knew naught of what lay before or whither he was going. For Merlin was his guide, leading him

by wild, untrodden ways toward Camelot, the fairy city which the wizard's own power had rebuilt and put in order for his coming.

One day while yet they were far from their journey's end, the heroes saw above the hills the summits of tall towers and pointed spires resting among the clouds. Then, as the mists parted, they caught glimpses of the city itself and a high-walled castle with a silvery river flowing by its gates. They stopped and gazed, and while they stood and wondered, the wind changed and the lovely vision melted in gray smoke and rolling vapor.

"Lead on, Merlin; lead on," said the King, impatiently. "I would fain get a closer view of that city of dreams which seems to sit midway between the earth and the sky."

"Truly thou shalt view it both without and within," answered the wizard; "for was it not rebuilt and adorned for thee alone? Lo, unseen powers have strengthened its walls, and fairy fingers have adorned it against thy coming."

So the heroes rode onward, wondering and for the most part silent. But every man trusted Merlin for his loyalty and love, and for his far-seeing wisdom. They traveled steadily, with faces turned always toward the hills, yet neither that day nor the next did they see any further signs of the mysterious city.

On the third morning, however, as they emerged from a dense forest, they saw the white walls and towers of Camelot overtopping the hill before them. They climbed the steep road, and lo, the gates of the city stood wide open before them. Then as they drew nearer, they saw within the walls a noble castle with battlements and turrets gleaming like silver in the morning light.

“Behold this is Camelot,” said Merlin; and turning toward Arthur, he added, “and this is Camelot’s king.”

At once, from the high towers there was a sound of trumpets, and a thousand voices shouted: “Hail, hail to Britain’s hero! Long life and great glory to Arthur, the rightful king and overlord of this fair land.”

Then Arthur, with bared head, and hair falling like a shower of gold upon his shoulders, rode into the city. In front of him, and holding his bridle’s rein, walked Merlin, not wrinkled and bent as he had been, but erect and proud as in the days of his youth. At the King’s right hand rode the Archbishop in his coat of mail, and at his left was Sir Kay, his foster-brother. Behind him came Sir Baudwin and young Sir Bedivere; and following these were all the loyal knights who had put their hands in Arthur’s and promised to be his men.

Through the shadowy streets they rode, between stately homes and dreamlike palaces such as the kings of olden times had dwelt in. On every side rough places had been made smooth and dark corners had been brightened by the airy touch of the wizard's fingers. Here and there were gushing fountains, and statues hewn from whitest marble, and rich carvings in stone picturing the deeds of ancient heroes. And nowhere was anything seen that did not add in some degree to the beauty or the strength or the fitness of the whole.

Thus amid splendors unequaled, King Arthur rode wondering, while those who followed him scarcely knew whether they were awake or dreaming, so beautiful was everything. Onward they passed until they came to the fairy castle and saw its sunlit turrets and the river rippling by its walls. There the King alighted, and with his knights entered the long hall which thenceforth was to be his audience chamber.

"This is the home I have prepared for thee, my master," said Merlin. "Rest thou here and reign gloriously."

So Arthur abode in the fairy city of Camelot, and there he held his court. True to his promise, he made Sir Kay his seneschal, to have the care of his

household and to be the chief officer in his kingdom. He made Sir Baudwin his high constable, to have charge of his army and of all matters of war and of chivalry. He appointed Sir Brastias of the Marshes to be warden of Britain, to guard the borders, and to see that no foe entered the land. As for young Sir Bedivere, he kept him ever near to his own person, loving him as a brother; for, at his crowning, he had been the first of all the knights to do him homage. And higher than all others, in honor and in love, he placed Sir Ector of Lyonesse, saying to him, "You are the King's father." He sent also to the distant West and brought the Lady Florimel from her mountain home. "You are the King's mother," he said, "and to you he will ever do most loving homage."

Every day at the hour of noon, the King sat on his marble throne with his crown upon his head. Ranged round the hall were guards, tall men clad in mail, with shield on arm and battle-ax in hand. Standing on this side and on that, were his counselors, the wise men of his realm; and within easy call were the young knights whom he loved and trusted most.

As the bell in the tower rang out the middle of the day, the doors were thrown wide open and the heralds cried aloud:—

"Behold, the King sits in his judgment hall! If there be any who are suffering wrong, if there be any who are in trouble because of evil doers, if there be any who are in urgent need of help, let such come freely and ask for justice without fear."

So, every day, men came, and women, and even children, and told the King of their wrongs; and to each one he gave judgment as seemed to him most right and true. The rich and the poor came, the friendly and the unfriendly, and all received justice according to their merits.

A poor widow came, dressed in the garb of mourning. She knelt at his feet, crying, "A boon, Sir King! a boon!"

"Arise and say on," commanded Arthur.

"A long time ago," said the woman, "when Uther was overlord of Britain, my husband's lands and houses were taken from him by order of the king. All the gold, also, which he had gathered through years of toil was stolen for Uther's treasury. Then he and I, who had been so well-to-do, were forced to become beggars, and my husband died for lack of food. Is there no justice in this land, O King?"

Then Arthur answered, "Thy husband I cannot give back to thee. But thou shalt have thy fields again, and from my own treasury thou shalt be

given gold, three times as much as was lost through Uther's greediness."

When she had gone, blessing the King and weeping as she went, another widow came and stood



before the throne with head held high and eyes flashing with pride.

"A boon, a boon, Sir Arthur!" she cried hotly and in angry tones.

"Say on," said the King.

"Say on, I will, and unafraid," she answered. "For I am your enemy, and you are no king. My husband was with King Lot at Caerleon what time you

fought him there. He was slain by one of your low-born men, and I was left without a protector. Then his brother, who follows you for his own gain, seized his castle and his lands and drove me out into the world penniless. What can I do but look to you for justice, though I hate you? All the world knows that you are not Uther's son. You are not a king, and yet I am forced to call you such. I cry for justice, Arthur."

There was murmuring among the King's counselors, and one said to Sir Kay, "Will you not punish her for her hatefulness?"

But the King motioned to them to keep silence. He sat for some moments as though weighing his thoughts. Then he said:—

"Once on a time there lived a King much greater than myself. This King commanded that we should love those who hate us, and I doubt not that He spoke wisely. Therefore, though this woman's words have pained me much, yet she shall have justice. Ride forth, my brave knights, and restore to her all that is her own."

And then there came a little child, weeping bitterly. "A boon, a boon, O King!" she sobbed.

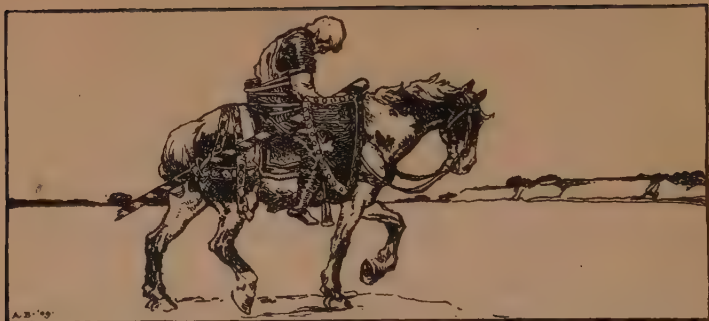
"Tell me what it is, dear one," said the King. "What is the cause of thy sorrow?"

"O King," answered the child, "a bird built its

nest under my window, and every morning it woke me with its sweet singing. But the man who is neighbor to us loves no living thing. This very day he killed my bird with a stone. See, see, O King!" and she held up to view the dead and bloody body of her pet.

Then Arthur kissed the child and blessed her, while he bade his servants find the man and punish him with stripes, as he deserved.

Thus, every day, did the King sit on his throne and deal justice to high and low.



STORY THE EIGHTH

SIR GRIFLET AND PELLINORE



ONE day a young squire came riding into the courtyard of Arthur's castle carrying a wounded knight in his arms.

"O King," he said, "here is my master, Sir Miles, the worthiest and best knight that the sun did ever shine upon. For three days we have been riding hitherward, and the only thought in his mind was to see you and do you homage. But now he is dying, and he does not know that he is in Camelot."

Then, as some ran quickly to lift the knight down and carry him into the hall, the squire told briefly how it had happened.

— "We were riding through the forest," he said; "in fact, we were almost within sight of the towers of Camelot, when we saw a white tent beneath a great

oak. It was close by a spring where the water gushes up through a rock. As we drew near to the tent, we saw beside it a tall knight who was clad in black armor and wore a helmet with a black plume floating above it. He had on his left arm a shield of many colors, and with his right arm he flourished a mighty lance. His horse, saddled and bridled, stood near him, and his squire lay sleeping in the shadow of a tree.

"When he saw us approaching, he cried out hoarsely, 'No one shall pass this spring without first fighting me.' My master thought that he was jesting. He was about to make some pleasant answer when the strange knight quickly mounted and came dashing toward us as though he would unhorse us both. My master had no time to defend himself. The stranger's lance struck him squarely in the breast and hurled him to the earth.

"I ran to help him up. The cruel knight coolly checked his steed and rode back to the tent beneath the oak. He said not a single word. He offered me no aid as I lifted Sir Miles and placed him across the saddle in front of me. 'Carry me to King Arthur,' murmured my poor master. 'Carry me to the King, that I may see him ere I die.' And then he swooned quite away in my arms."

The King was much moved by this story. His

face flushed with anger, and he asked the squire's name.

"I am called Griflet," was the answer.

"Surely," said Arthur, "it is no true knight who lies in wait at my very gates and slays unoffending travelers. Such lawlessness must not go unpunished."

"Sir King," said Griflet, "I would that I were a knight. Then I would go out and avenge my master."

"Thou art very brave," answered the King; "but thou art still only a boy, and full tender of age to take so high an order upon thee."

"Sir," said Griflet, and he stood up very straight and proud, "I am almost nineteen years of age. If you will pardon me, I know a certain King who is not much older."

"Truly thou art wise of speech, and I have a liking for thee," cried Arthur. "To-morrow thou shalt be a knight."

Very glad then was young Griflet. Very impatiently did he wait for the morrow.

"Soon my poor master will be avenged," he kept saying to himself.

But when Merlin saw how slender the young man was, and how gentle was his face, he spoke to the King about him.

"Sir," he said, "it would be a pity to lose this Griflet. He is full of courage and as true as gold. He will be a good man if he lives. But if you let him go out to fight with the keeper of the spring, you are not likely to see him again at your court."

"He is indeed a gentle youth," answered the King, "and no one would grieve for him more than I. Yet I think it would not be right to hold him back from his desire."

So, in the morning, Griflet was made a knight.

"Sir Griflet," said Arthur, "I have given thee thy wish, and I know thou wilt be true and brave. Now, thou must grant me a favor."

"Tell me what it is, O King," answered the young knight.

"It is this. When you go out to meet that rude fellow at the spring, challenge him for only a joust with spears. Then, when you have had one joust with him, ride back to me without more ado. Promise that you will do this."

"I promise, and will do as you wish," answered Sir Griflet.

Then he hastily mounted and rode away.

With his shield on his saddlebow and a great spear in his hand, he passed out through the gates. His bright new armor glistened in the sunlight, and

the plumes upon his helmet nodded gayly in the breeze. He urged his horse to a swift gallop, and thus riding he entered the forest and sped along the woodland path.

It was no great distance to the spring under the old oak. There he saw the white tent still standing, with a pennant of many colors floating above it. There, too, was the knight's horse, tethered to a tree, and there was his squire dozing in the shadow of the tent. But the knight himself was nowhere to be seen.

As Sir Griflet rode up, he saw a shield hanging upon the oak, and by it a long and heavy spear was leaning. The shield was painted gaudily, red, yellow, and blue; but it bore no device to tell the name or the rank of its owner.

Sir Griflet leaned forward upon his saddle and smote the shield with the end of his spear. It fell with a great clattering to the ground.

At that moment the curtains of the tent were parted and the strange knight came out, clad in full armor. He was a tall man, very large and powerful; and his dark face was shadowed with a scowl which was not pleasant to see.

"Have a care, my young knight," he cried. "Why do you knock down my shield?"

Griflet laughed lightly and struck the shield a



second time. "I have come to joust with you," he said.

"You had better not do that," said the stranger. "You are only a boy and not used to such rough play. I might hurt you more than you think."

"Let that be as it may," answered Sir Griflet; "I challenge you to a single joust with spears alone."

"Well," answered the strange knight, "since your mind is made up for it, I must needs do as you wish. But I am loath to joust with one so young and slender. Tell me your name."

"I am Sir Griflet; and I am from King Arthur's court," was the answer.

"And I am King Pellinore, lord of all these wild woods which men call the Forest Perilous," said the other, taking up his shield and his spear and mounting his steed.

The two rode a little way apart, and then, turning about, drove swiftly at each other. Poor Sir Griflet's spear was shivered to pieces on Pellinore's shield. But his own light shield was no safeguard against his enemy's strong weapon. Right through it, and right through the bright new armor, Pellinore thrust his spear. The sharp point entered Sir Griflet's side. The red blood gushed forth. Knight and horse fell helpless in the dust.

Sad was Pellinore's heart when he saw his

young foe thus lying senseless before him. He alighted and went to his aid.

"I fear that I have slain him; but he would have it so," he said to himself.

He knelt down and unlaced Sir Griflet's helmet. He loosened his armor. The young knight groaned and opened his eyes.

"It is only a scratch," he said. Then the air grew dark to him, and he fainted quite away.

Pellinore took him up and set him on his horse. He bound him gently across the saddle, so that he would ride easily and not slide off. He fastened also his spear and his shield beside him. Then he turned the horse's head toward Camelot and gave it the rein.

"Go back to thy friends, Sir Griflet," said Pellinore; "and may God prosper thee. For surely thou hast a mighty heart, and if thou live thou wilt be a passing good knight."

So Sir Griflet rode, senseless and alone, back into Camelot. And when King Arthur's knights saw him and knew what had befallen him, they cried out with grief and anger, and hastened to give him such aid as they could.



STORY THE NINTH

IN THE FOREST PERILOUS

KING ARTHUR was very sorrowful when he was told of the sad case of Sir Griflet; for the young man had pleased him much, and he was loath to lose him.

“Carry him to a quiet chamber,” he said, “and let everything be done for his comfort and for the healing of his hurt.”

Then he went alone to his own room, and there he paced to and fro, now weeping for poor Griflet and now crying out bitterly against the strange knight who had dealt so harshly with him.

“I myself will punish this robber of the forest,” he said. “I will make him repent his wicked deeds.”

After a while he called for the young squire who had charge of his armor and his horse.

"Canst thou keep a secret?" he asked.

"Try me, my lord," answered the squire.

"Then do as I bid thee, and tell no man. At the break of day to-morrow morning, meet me at the oak tree close by the city gate. Have with thee my horse, all ready for the jousting; and bring also my best spear and the shield that I carry in battle. Be wary and wise, and wait in the shadow of the tree till I come."

"I will obey you, Sir King," answered the squire.

So, very early in the morning, while it was yet dark, King Arthur rose and clad himself in armor that was serviceable and strong. He girded his sword upon his side, and set a helmet of gray iron upon his head. Then he sauntered forth into the street alone.

All Camelot was asleep. With quiet footsteps the King made his way to the open square before the city gate, and to the great oak tree that stood by the wall.

"Art thou here, Dagonet?" he asked.

And for answer, the squire came out from the shadow of the tree, leading the King's fair horse all saddled and bridled.

Arthur mounted eagerly and took the shield and the long spear. "Stay here, Dagonet, until I return," he said.

The gray dawn was already beginning to light the eastern sky.

The warden who kept watch above the gate looked out. He saw the dark figure of a knight on horseback approaching the gate.

"Who rides there?" he cried.

"I ride on the King's business," was the answer. "Open the gate."

Without further parley the watchman obeyed. The King rode out, and turned his horse into the way that led to the Forest Perilous. For a while he went slowly, for the mists hung heavy among the hills, and the pathway was not easy to follow. But when the sun arose, lighting up the darkest places, he urged his steed forward with greater swiftness. Suddenly, near the edge of the forest, he heard loud cries and the sound of men's voices disputing. The next moment he saw an old man running among the trees and closely followed by three rude churls with clubs in their hands.

"Ah, it is Merlin!" cried Arthur; and he rode with speed to his aid.

When the churls saw a knight in armor so close upon them, they turned and fled into the thick wood, not daring to pause or look behind. And Merlin, all out of breath, took hold of the King's stirrup and thanked him for his timely coming.

"It was indeed lucky for you," said Arthur, "for in another moment the rascals would have been upon you, and none of your enchantments could have saved you."

"You are wrong," said Merlin; "for although I was hard beset, I could have escaped at the last pinch. I was not in half so much danger as you are at this moment."

"How is that?" asked Arthur.

"You are riding to your death," answered Merlin. "I know what is your errand, and I know that unless God loves you, you shall not return alive."

"Be it life or be it death," said Arthur, "I shall not shrink from that which I have undertaken."

Then he rode onward at a gentle pace through the forest, while Merlin walked by his side.

In a little while they came in sight of the spring by the roadside, and there they saw a knight standing as if on guard. It was the same Pellinore who had wounded Sir Griflet so sorely.

"Sir Knight," said Arthur, "what is your business here? Are you the keeper of this spring, and can no traveler ride this way without first jousting with you?"

"It is even as you say," answered Pellinore.

"Then I command you to give up this custom of yours," said Arthur.

"The custom pleases me," answered the knight; "and if any one dislikes it, let him mend it."

"I will mend it," said the King.

"And I will defend it," said the other.

Then Pellinore mounted his steed and dressed his shield and took his great spear in his hand. And there, in the shadows of the wood, the two rode furiously against each other. At the first shock, the spears of both were shattered, and their shields were dented almost through. Yet they still sat in their saddles and seemed scarcely shaken by the encounter. They checked their steeds and faced each other again.

"Now, defend thyself!" cried Arthur, as he drew his sword.

"Be not hasty," answered his enemy, coolly. "It would be more fair if we should run together again with spears."

"That would please me much," said the King, "but my spear is shattered and I have no other."

"I have spears in plenty," answered the knight; and thereupon his squire came running from the tent with two spears that were both long and sharp. He gave one to Arthur and the other to his master, and then stood by to watch the combat.

The two rode apart for a hundred paces or more, and then, turning, they spurred their horses furiously.

They came together with a shock that seemed to shake the very earth, and again their spears were splintered into fragments. But still they sat in their saddles.

Then Arthur for the second time drew his sword.

"Nay, nay, not yet," cried Pellinore. "Never have I met so good a jouster as you, and I like this rare sport. Let us, for the love of our high order, run together once again."

"I am willing," answered Arthur; and thereupon, the squire ran and fetched two other spears.

For the third time, the King and the knight dashed against each other. The King's spear was shivered in pieces as before; but Pellinore's struck Arthur's shield with such force that both he and his horse were hurled to the ground.

He sprang up quickly, however, and drew his sword.

"Sir Knight," he cried, "I have lost the honor on horseback, and now I will contend with you on foot."

Sir Pellinore laughed.

"It is true," he answered, "that you are on foot; but I am still on horseback."

At this, the King's anger rose.

"Shame upon such knighthood as yours!" he cried. And with that he dressed his shield and rushed with drawn sword upon the knight.

Sir Pellinore dismounted quickly.

"My knighthood is not at fault," he said. "Never will I take another at disadvantage, for that would be shame indeed."

Then began such a sword fight as had never been seen in that forest. Long and fiercely did the two



men stand there, thrusting and parrying, and each hewing great chips out of the other's shield. Back and forth, hither and thither, they tramped in their great fury. Sometimes the victory seemed to be for Sir Pellinore, sometimes for King Arthur. Anon they stopped awhile to rest, and then they

rushed upon each other more madly than before. Blood flowed; the leaves were dyed red; the armor of the King was splattered and smeared in many places.

At last their swords met in mid-air. The King's weapon was broken short off by the hilt. He was disarmed.

"Now I have thee!" cried Sir Pellinore. "Yield to me as a recreant, or die."

"As for death," said the King, "it will be welcome when it comes. But never will I yield as a recreant. I would rather die than be so shamed."

Thus speaking, he leaped suddenly upon Pellinore, threw him to the ground, and tore his helmet from his head. The knight was never so taken unawares, and for a moment he thought himself lost. But he had great strength and skill, and with a sudden twist of the body he brought King Arthur under him. Then, holding him down with his knee, he arose and raised his sword to strike.

"Hold, Sir Knight!" cried Merlin. "Hold your hand; for if you slay him, you will do such harm to Britain as was never done before. He is a greater man than you ever dreamed of."

"Indeed!" said Pellinore. "Who is he?"

"It is King Arthur," answered Merlin.

"What care I for King Arthur? He is no king

of mine." And with that, the knight raised his sword still higher.

But before the weapon could descend, Merlin uttered a strange word of enchantment. Instantly a deep sleep overcame Sir Pellinore. The sword dropped harmless from his hand, and he fell to the earth wrapped in the soundest slumber.

Then Merlin raised Arthur up and set him upon his horse, for he was sore wounded and weak from loss of blood.

"What have you done, Merlin, my friend?" asked the King. "Have you slain this dauntless knight with your magic arts?"

"Have no worry about that," answered the wizard. "He is not so badly off as yourself. At the end of three hours he will awake and be as doughty and strong as before."

"Ah, but he is a knight of valor," murmured the King.

"Indeed, he is," said Merlin; "and he would have slain you had I not been here to prevent."

Thus talking, the two wended their way through the forest—the King sitting feebly in his saddle, and the wizard walking by his side and gently supporting him.

But they went not toward Camelot.



STORY THE TENTH

THE LADY OF THE LAKE

DEEP in the forest there was a little lake where the shadows fell cool at midday and the water was flecked green and white with blooming lilies.

Not far from this lake a holy hermit dwelt in a narrow cell which he had hollowed out for himself in the side of a hill. There he passed his days in solitude with no friends but the birds, and no neighbors but the timid creatures of the woods. But in his younger days he had been a student in distant Rome, and there he had learned the physician's art and had become skilled in the healing of wounds. He knew the subtle power of roots and herbs, and could tell the name of every plant that grew in the forest or on the margin of the lake.

To this hermit Merlin led the wounded King, sitting limp and helpless astride his steed. When the good man saw Arthur's pale face and half-closed eyes, and his armor smeared with blood, he made haste to give him aid.

"My son," he said, "thou hast indeed been nigh to death's door. Thou art welcome to such help as I can give thee."

But the King heard him not, nor knew to what manner of place he had been brought; for he had swooned away in Merlin's arms.

They lifted him gently and carried him into the hermit's cell. They took off his armor and laid him on the hermit's own pallet of straw. Then the good man dressed his wounds and placed healing salves upon them. He bathed his forehead with a magic ointment, while Merlin, with crossed hands and uplifted eyes, muttered strange spells of enchantment. Soon the color began to come again into Arthur's cheeks; he opened his eyes; he smiled, and whispered his thanks. The pain had left him.

For three days the King lay in the quiet cell, tended by Merlin and the hermit. His wounds healed fast, and his strength returned with marvelous quickness. But the hermit did not know the name of his royal patient, nor did he ask it.

On the fourth day Arthur rose from his couch,

as well and sound as when he had started on this perilous venture.

"Now, gird on my armor," he said, "and bring me my steed. For I must ride home to my friends in Camelot."

So Merlin brought his coat of mail, all hacked and scarred as it was, and helped him to buckle it on. He placed his helmet on his head, and drew on his greaves and his armlets. Then he led forth his steed, all saddled and bridled, with his battered shield hanging from the saddlebow.

"I thank you heartily," said Arthur. "No squire could have served me half so well." And to the hermit he said, "I thank you also, and with my whole heart; for you have snatched me out of the jaws of death and given me health and strength."

Then, bidding the good man farewell, he rode away, while Merlin walked sturdily by his side.

The pathway led them along the shore of the lake, and they looked out upon the quiet water gleaming under the morning sun.

"I seem to be but half a knight," said Arthur, musingly.

"Why so, Sir King?" asked Merlin.

"Because I have no sword," was the answer. "How can any knight defend himself without a weapon?"

"If you will look before you," said Merlin, "you will see a better sword than any you have lost." And he pointed over the lake.

Then Arthur, looking, saw a thing that was passing strange and wonderful. For, in the middle of the lake, a hand and arm rose slowly out of the water. The arm was partly clad in silk of marvellous beauty, and in the hand was the scabbard of a jewel-hilted sword.

"There is the sword for you," said Merlin. "Fairer weapon was never seen in all this land."

As he spoke, Arthur was aware of a beautiful maiden moving along the shore of the lake. She glided hither and thither as lightly and airily as the thistle down riding upon the breeze, and sometimes she seemed to be really floating upon the water.

"Who is that who looks so like a fairy queen?" asked Arthur.

"She is the Lady of the Lake," answered Merlin, "and she is in truth a fairy queen. She is the keeper of the sword which you see lifted above the waves; and if you speak her fairly, she will give it to you."

"That is what I will do," said the King; and he gave spurs to his steed and rode forward to speak to her.

"Fair lady," he said, "what sword is that which I see lifted up from the water over there? I would that it were mine, for I have none."

"Sir King," answered the maiden, "the sword is for the hero who is most worthy to carry it. I fashioned it with my own hands in my fairy smithy beneath the smoking hills. Nine years I toiled shaping it and tempering it. Its name is Excalibur, and you shall have it if you will give me a gift when I ask it."

So entrancing was her beauty and so tempting was the sword, that the King had no thought to refuse. "In faith, I will give you anything you wish," he said.

"Then go and get the sword," said the maiden. "Right here among the reeds you will find a boat moored to the shore. Take it and row out into the lake. When you have come to the place of the sword, reach out and grasp the scabbard with the weapon in it. It shall be yours. As for the gift, I will ask it of you at another time."

Forthwith, Arthur alighted and tied his horse to a tree. Then going down to the shore with Merlin, he saw the boat moored among the reeds as the lady had said. They entered it and loosed it from its moorings. It glided smoothly and gently out into the open lake. No oars were needed, nor any

helm, for the boat sailed of itself right to the spot where the sword was raised out of the water.

The silk-clothed arm was still there. The hand with its fair white fingers still held aloft the sword Excalibur.

The King leaned over the prow of the boat and lightly seized the scabbard. Instantly, the arm and hand were withdrawn into the water, leaving the glorious weapon in his grasp.

"It is a rare good blade," he said, as he drew the sword from its covering and gazed lovingly at its sun-bright edge.

"But here is something written on this side, and something also on the other. Thou art a scholar, Merlin; read these inscriptions for me."

The magician bent forward and looked at the mystic writing on the blade.

"Sir King," he said, "on the one side is written 'KEEP ME,' and on the other 'THROW ME AWAY.'"

"Then which had I better do?" asked the King.

"Keep it," answered Merlin. "The time to throw it away has not yet come. But what do you think of the scabbard?"

"It is indeed beautiful," said King Arthur. "It is a fair cover for such a sword, but worth nothing without it."



(113) "THE KING LEANED OVER THE PROW OF THE BOAT"

"How unwise you are!" said Merlin. "The scabbard is worth ten times as much as the sword; for it is a magic scabbard, and while you have it upon you, no weapon can wound you unto death. But if ever you should chance to lose it, your sword will avail you but little."

While they were talking, the boat, of its own accord, had carried them back to the shore. King Arthur looked around for the Lady of the Lake, wishing to thank her for her gift; but she had vanished.

He saw a gray cloud floating away over the water; and he fancied that he heard the sound of laughter echoing among the reeds. He hastened to mount and ride away.

Presently, as they came to a turn in the road, they saw a white tent with a pennant of many colors floating above it.

"Whose tent can that be?" asked the King.

"It is the tent of Sir Pellinore, the knight who gave you so hard a fight," answered Merlin. "He is far away just now. For he has defeated a good knight, Sir Eglamore, and is pursuing him through the woods."

"I would that he were here," said the King. "I would test the temper of Excalibur upon his shield."

"Therein you are unwise," said Merlin, "for he is

the most powerful knight in Britain. You could not prevail against him, even with your new sword."

"It may be that you are right," answered the King; and he rode onward through the leafy wood.

They were still a long way from Camelot when they saw, coming towards them, a tall knight on a black horse of great size and beauty. As he drew near, Arthur thought he had never seen so large a man with form so graceful and mien so fearless.

"Ah, but I should be proud to have that knight at my court in Camelot!" he cried.

"Indeed," said Merlin, "you may have him soon."

But the stranger gave no heed to them. With head erect, and looking neither to the right nor to the left, he passed them without speaking. The path was so narrow that the trappings of his steed brushed against the King's shield as he rode by.

"What an odd fellow he is!" said Arthur. "He did not seem to see us, though I might have touched him with my hand. Perhaps he is in a trance; or perhaps he is fulfilling a vow."

"Or perhaps he is busy with his own thoughts," added Merlin.

"I would that I knew his name and his home," said the King.

"His home," answered the magician, "is the Forest Perilous, and his name is Sir Pellinore."

"Sir Pellinore!"

"Yes, Sir Pellinore, the same who gave you so hard a fight. He did not see us, for I had thrown a magic cloud around us and we were invisible."

"I did not know that he was so mighty a man," said Arthur. "He seems much taller and bigger than on the day I jousted with him. Yet if I had known it was he, I would not have passed him without a challenge."

"It is well that you kept silent," answered Merlin.

So they went on until they came to Camelot and passed through the great gate rejoicing. And as Arthur rode down the street and into his fair courtyard, a thousand voices greeted him; and no one asked him where he had been.

"Where is Sir Griflet?" he inquired.

"Here I am!" shouted the young knight himself, running forward to hold the King's stirrup.

"In truth, I am glad to find thee alive and well," said Arthur.

Then all the knights gathered around him, while Merlin told them of his adventure and showed them the wondrous blade, Excalibur.

"It is indeed merry," they said, "to serve a king who puts himself in peril just as any common knight would do."



STORY THE ELEVENTH

THE COMING OF GUINEVERE

NOW, whether the King sat in his judgment hall or whether he rode out to do knightly deeds, a fair picture was always present before him. For he fancied that he saw, in daylight and in darkness, the sweet face of the princess Guinevere, just as she had appeared when looking down upon him from the royal balcony at Cameliant. And often in dreams he saw her, crowned with roses and blushing red like the dawn of a summer's day. So, at last, he spoke to Merlin and told him the secret of his heart.

Then Merlin said, "Gladly would your knights and all your people see a queen sitting beside you on your throne. But is there not some other princess whom you could love even better than Guinevere?"

"Nay, nay," answered Arthur, "there is no lady in the world so fair and so valiant as Guinevere. She is the loveliest that I could ever find."

"As for her beauty," answered Merlin, "I know there is none living that is her equal. Yet if your heart was not set, I could find another damsel of surpassing goodness who would please you. But where a man's heart is set, there he will fain be."

"That is true," said Arthur, "and I will wed Guinevere and none other."

Then he bade Merlin take Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias and Sir Bedivere, and journey straightway to Cameliard. "And when you have come to King Leodegrance," he said, "remind him gently of the promise which he made, when I sat with him in his hall, to give me any gift that I might ask."

So the magician and the three knights rode down to Cameliard.

"O Leodegrance," they said, "we have come from Camelot and the court of King Arthur—that same Arthur who drove the heathen from the borders of your land and gave you peace. Now he is established on his throne, and he says to you, 'If I have ever served you well, remember now your promise to give me any gift that I may choose. Give me your daughter Guinevere to be my wife.'"

Leodegrance was pleased at heart; yet he made as though he would hesitate.

"Great love have I for Arthur," he said, "and great is my debt to him. But who is he? Is he in truth a king, or is he an upstart knight? Who knows aught of his birth and parentage?"

Then Merlin told again the story of that wonderful midnight when old King Uther died. He told also of the magic sword embedded in the anvil, and of Arthur's coronation in London. "What further proofs can any one wish," he asked, "if these things do not show that Arthur is in truth the king of the Britons?"

"No further proofs are needed," said Leodegrance; "for it is plain that God has chosen him. Great honor it is that my daughter should wed a king of such true worth as he, and I will gladly give her to him."

The messengers thanked him.

"In May, when the flowers are in bloom," said Merlin, "the King will send for his bride."

"But stay," said Leodegrance. "My daughter must not go without her dowry, poor though I am. I would give King Arthur of my lands, but I know that he has enough already. I would give him gold, but I have so little that it would count for nothing in Camelot. Therefore I will send him a

gift the like of which there is none in all the world. I will send him the Table Round, which King Uther gave me when he was my overlord."

"I know that table well," said Merlin; "for it was I who fashioned it for old King Uther. With my magic skill I hewed the timbers of it and shaped it to picture the roundness of the earth, just as a ring is made to picture eternity."

"It is a rare piece of workmanship," said Leodegrance, "and the King will be pleased with it. There are seats around it for a hundred and fifty knights. Glad would I be to fill these seats for King Arthur with brave men of my own; but alas, so many knights have been slain in these cruel times! I have only a hundred left. He shall have these to grace his wedding and to sit by him when he feasts in his great hall."

Merlin thanked him, and with his three companions returned to Camelot and told the King.

Then Arthur chose from among his knights that one whom he esteemed the courtliest and the best, Sir Lancelot of Benwick, who had but lately come over from France. And he bade him take servants not a few, and horses, and a strong bodyguard of knights, and go forthwith to far Cameliard to fetch his bride.

"Take also Merlin with you," he said, "that he

may bring the Table Round which Leodegrance has promised me."

So Sir Lancelot, the gallant one, rode out to do his pleasant errand, and the King watched him from the gates. The April sun was shining on the fields, and April flowers were blooming in the woods.

Days passed, and then one morning in May the King stood again in the watchtower by the gates.



He looked out, and above the singing of the birds he heard the winding call of a bugle far away among the wooded hills. He watched and waited; and by and by he saw horsemen coming up from the forest, and behind them a company of fair ladies and brave

men — the fairest and the bravest that the world has ever seen.

In the midst of the procession rode Sir Lancelot, and at his side on a snow-white palfrey was the princess Guinevere. Then followed Merlin, the magician, with the wonderful Table Round, and the hundred knights whom Leodegrance had sent to grace the wedding feast and the court of the King. As these came forward over the fields and between the green hedgerows, the air was filled with sweetest sounds — of birds singing and joy bells ringing to welcome the lovely bride, the loveliest and the fairest in all the world. The sun shone his best that morning, the sky was never so blue, the earth was never so beautifully clad. And King Arthur watched from the tower and felt that now the sum of all joy was his.

Thus came the princess to fairy Camelot, and ere another day she and the King were married, kneeling before a stately altar in the stateliest church in Britain. And around the King stood his knights, arrayed in spotless white and rejoicing in his joy. And the Archbishop lifted up his hands and blessed the royal pair as they promised each to be the other's forevermore.

"Let come what will," said Arthur, "I shall always love thee."

“My king and lord,” said blushing Guinevere, “my love for thee shall never cease.”

Then the trumpets sounded, and from the walls and roofs of Camelot arose such shouting and such sounds of joy as were never heard in Britain.

“The old order has passed away,” sang Merlin; and the knights responded, “Now is the dawning of a better day.”



STORY THE TWELFTH

A FELLOW FRESH FROM THE FIELDS



NE day there came to Arthur's court a noble lady of middle age, dark-faced, dark-eyed, and of queenly bearing.

"O King," she said, "my name is Bellicent, and I am the widow of King Lot of Orkney, with whom you fought in the great battle at Caerleon. If reports be true, you and I are near of kin."

"How, indeed, can that be?" asked Arthur.

The lady answered: "There was once a king in this land whose name was Gorloïs, and he had a wife of wondrous beauty whose name was Ygerne. They dwelt in a white castle by the sea, and Gorloïs defied old King Uther and would not serve him. Then Uther made pitiless war upon him and slew him and took the fair Ygerne to be his own wife.

But within a year thereafter old Uther died alone in his dark tower upon the cliffs; and in that self-same hour, Ygerne also died in her white castle by the sea."

"All this I have heard before," said Arthur. "What has it to do with any kinship between you and me?"

"I am the daughter of Gorloïs and fair Ygerne," answered Bellicent, "and the white castle by the sea was my home until King Lot carried me away to the Orkneys."

"That also have I heard," said Arthur.

"But have you heard this, O King?" asked the lady. "There are those who say that you are the son of old Uther and of that same fair queen, Ygerne. They say that you were born in her white castle by the sea, and that, through the magic of the great master Bleys, you were carried on the waves to the foot of the cliffs beneath old Uther's tower."

"If that be true," said Arthur, "then we are indeed near of kin. But who knows?"

"No one knows, unless it be the wizard Bleys, and he has not been seen since Uther died. Not even wise Merlin is sure, for I have asked him. I have told you the story because there are some who believe it."

"And do you believe it?" asked Arthur.

"I know that I am Queen Ygerne's child," was the answer, "but as to yourself, I doubt. Her face was beautiful, but dark; her eyes were black like my own; her hair was like the raven's wing. Old Uther was also dark, with shaggy eyebrows and coarse, grizzled hair, and jaws firm-set and large. My father, Gorlois, was dark but handsome, with thin lips and piercing eyes like those of my son Modred; and all say that I resemble him. I am dark, and of a dark race. But you, O King!—your yellow hair and your blue eyes and your fair skin are the talk of all Britain. You are not the son of old Uther; you cannot be the child of my mother; there is no kinship between us."

"I thank you for what you have said," answered the King; and he turned away, thoughtfully and with a shade of sadness on his brow.

The next day Bellicent came again, bringing her two sons to present them to the King. The younger, Gawain, was a tall young knight, fair-haired, open-faced, and of fearless mien, as his father Lot must have been in the days of his youth. The elder, whose name was Modred, was also a knight, but dark-hued, thin-lipped, and with eyes furtive and ever glancing this way and that.

"O King," said Bellicent, "here are my two sons who have come to offer their homage to you. For although their father fought against you and you

overcame him, yet they would pray you to forget the past and accept them as true and humble subjects ready to serve you in whatsoever you may command."

Thereupon the two young knights came forward and knelt at the feet of the King; and each in turn put his hands between the King's hands and vowed to be his man, faithful in peace, brave in war, and loyal and true as long as life should endure. And Arthur, as he held the hands of Sir Gawain, rejoiced that he had gained a knight so gentle in manners, so warm of heart, and so noble in person. But when Modred's clammy palms rested within his grasp, a chill of dread caused him to shudder as though some hated reptile had touched him.

"Arise, brave knights," he said. "I receive you into my household and into the company of the chosen ones who sit with me at my Table Round. Be ever just and true, gentle, and without reproach."

Then he bade Sir Kay, the seneschal, to lead them to their places at the Round Table, and to assign to each the duties which he was expected to perform. As they bowed and passed out, the King turned again to their mother, and asked, —

"Are these your only sons?"

"I have others," answered Bellicent, "but they are still mere children. One is a youth just turning

into a man. He is tall, taller than these, yet he is too young for arms, and therefore abides at home to comfort his mother."

"What is his name?"

"Gareth — Gareth, the flaxen-haired; and for grace and gentle courage there is no lad to compare with him."

"When he is of age, let him come to me," said the King.

Now all this while, Gareth tarried at his mother's castle on the farther side of the forest; and at each rising of the sun he grew more and more impatient to be a man and a knight, that so he might win for himself a name.

"How slowly the days pass," he said to himself, "and how long the hours seem from morning until morning again! Mother says I am not old enough by three years to be a knight. Yet I know I am tall enough — taller by half a head than brother Gawain, and a whole head taller than Modred. Mother still thinks of me as a child; she has always wished that I would never grow up. If she were less careful of me, I would be the better off.

"But mothers will be mothers, and mine will never believe that I am safe when out of her watchful sight. I am tired of being petted and cared for as though unable to care for myself. I will go

right now and tell her so, and I will tire her ears with the telling."

So Gareth went to seek his mother. He found her sitting in her easy-chair by the window and watching the swallows that were nesting under the eaves. He leaned over, and with his cheek against hers, whispered:—

"Here is your child, sweet mother. Do you love him?"

The mother laughed and stroked his long hair tenderly. "What a goose you are for asking such a question!"

"Then if you love me, mother, why are you so unkind?" he answered. "Here I am, tall and strong as any man. Yet you keep me tethered to you, and will not let me go forth to do the duties that are a man's, lest you should lose me. If you love me, mother, give me leave to go and serve the King as my brothers now are serving him."

"Wait a little while, sweet son," she said. "This Arthur may not be the rightful king. There are many who still doubt him. Stay here till more is known about his birth and history. I would not have you serve a false king."

"Nor will I!" cried Gareth. "But Arthur is not false. I would walk through fire, mother, to be made one of his knights."

And so, day after day, the lad, like a bird beating its wings against its cage, begged for his freedom.

"If you love me, mother, you will not keep me here," he kept saying, until she grew tired of hearing. She pitied him also, because she knew the longing and the grief that filled his heart.

At length she said : " Gareth, you are still a boy in years and too young to be a knight. Yet, if you will promise me one thing, I will give you leave to go and serve the King."

" What is it, mother? " cried Gareth. " I promise before you name it. I will promise a hundred things if only I may go."

" It is this, sweet son," she answered: " You shall go to the King disguised as a country lad. You must not tell any one your name or your station. But you must hire yourself to be a scullion in the kitchen, to wash the kettles and the pans."

" How long shall I serve thus? " asked Gareth.

" A twelvemonth and a day," said his mother. She knew his pride, and thought that he would never stoop to so mean a service even to gain the ends he sought. But in this she reckoned wrongly.

" I am your son, sweet mother," he said, " and so I will obey you. Even as a scullion I shall see the jousts, and I will be near the King. And

then, humble as my place will be, I shall still be a prince in mind and heart."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes, I will go and be a kitchen scullion."

The mother wept, but she said nothing more. And Gareth, bending over her, kissed her tenderly and went out to make ready for his journey.

The next morning at early dawn, three men went out afoot through the castle gate and took the path that led through the forest. The youngest of these men was very tall and seemingly very awkward and uncouth. It was Gareth, disguised as a rude plow-boy; and his two companions were servants of the castle, likewise dressed as tillers of the soil. Few words did they say as they strode through the wood, keeping their faces turned steadily toward Camelot.

It was spring, and each leafy tree was joyful with the music of birds. And Gareth's heart was glad as he thought that at every step he was drawing nearer to the King.

At length, toward evening, they came out upon the plain, and looking up towards the hills they saw the spires and turrets of fairy Camelot glistening in the sun.

"Let us go no farther, master," said one of the men; "for that is a city of enchantment, and those

who are lured to enter its gates shall never escape therefrom."

"Yes, master," said the other, "it is all the work of Merlin, that prince of wizards; and men do say that King Arthur is only an elf whom Merlin has brought hither from fairyland. Let us return home while we may."

But Gareth only laughed and strode onward without answering a word; and the two churls followed him for love of him.

"We will die with the lad," they said; and indeed they had promised his mother the same.

By and by they saw the walls of Camelot, and then they drew near to the gate. The great portal stood wide open, for every person in Arthur's kingdom was free to pass in and out as he chose. Gareth and his companions, looking through, could see the paved streets and the princely houses and the marble castle of the King, with the river bathing its white walls. They paused outside, and waited, amazed and fearful.

While they were admiring the beautiful gate, an old man came out. His face was wrinkled and gray, and his long white beard reached almost to his knees. He spoke to them kindly and said: "You seem to be strangers at Camelot. Who are you, and what business has brought you hither?"

Gareth answered: "We are three plowboys from the other side of the forest. We have heard so much about this king whom they call Arthur that we have come to see the city where he lives. We thought perhaps we might catch sight of him as he passes through the gate."

"You may see him in his own hall if you like," answered the old man.

"But is he a real king?" asked Gareth. "Some folks say that he is a fairy whom Merlin has brought over from fairyland. They say that, some day at Merlin's word, both he and all this fair city will vanish in air. Is it true?"

"True, and still not true," said the man. "The city is enchanted. It was built by fairy folk who came hither out of the mountains of the West. These fairies carried harps; and when they played upon the strings, they made such music as was never thought of before. Then, as the wonderful melody filled the air, the walls of Camelot arose, and all those dreamlike towers and snow-white battlements lifted themselves out of the earth. No sound of hammer or of saw was heard, but only the bewitching strains of music."

"How wonderful!" said Gareth. "And is this, then, nothing but a dream city?"

"Just as you may think," was the answer.

"There are some people who say that the only real thing in it is the King. Others say that the city is substance and that King Arthur is only a shadow."

"And what do you say he is?"

"I say that he is the greatest of great enchanters; for all who once see him love him so much that they are ready to do his bidding forever after. So, now, if you are afraid, do not enter the gate, but hasten back to your home and your plows."

"Who speaks of being afraid?" said Gareth. "We have come to see the King, and see him we will."

"I knew you would say so," answered the old man; "for you are no plowboy. I know your name and your errand."

Gareth was about to make reply, but as he looked, the old man had vanished, and in his place was seen a little cloud of thin mist which floated softly away over the fields.

"I think," said he to his men, "that this must have been none other than Merlin himself."

"Then let us go home while we may," said they, fearfully.

But Gareth laughed and strode onward through the gate. "Follow me," he said; and they with trembling limbs obeyed.

So the three walked onward through the shadowy

streets of Camelot. The air seemed alive with music, as though the fairies were still building some enchanted tower or lofty battlement. Tall knights in glittering armor passed them, some on foot and some on prancing steeds. And from many a lofty balcony they heard the sound of laughter and the



voices of merry youths and gentle maidens. But no one seemed to take notice of the three plowboys who with wondering eyes and slouching gait were wending their way doubtfully towards the white castle.

At the foot of the steps that led upward to the King's hall, they paused. Then, since no one

forbade, they went up and looked in at the door. Oh, what a splendid sight was that which met their gaze!

There, in the midst of the hall, was the Table Round, and seated in their places were King Arthur and his chosen knights. The table was of marvelous beauty, inlaid with ivory and gold, and its polished sides and massive legs were ornamented with rare carvings of birds and beasts and unknown creatures. And placed around it in order were a hundred and fifty seats all likewise beautiful and richly made; but the seat in which Arthur sat and two others were the most beautiful of all.

Gareth boldly entered the hall and mingled with the servants who were standing there. He looked around at the splendid company who sat with the King, and he noticed that on each of the seats was a name written in letters of gold.

He turned to a squire who stood near him and asked, "What names are those that are written so beautifully on the seats?"

"They are the names of the knights to whom the seats belong," was the answer.

"The person who wrote them must have been a rare scribe," said Gareth. "I have never seen letters so brilliant and shapely."

"No person wrote them," said the squire. "Whenever a knight is found worthy to sit at the table, then immediately his name shines forth in gold upon the seat that he is fittest to occupy."

"How strange!" said Gareth.

"Strange it is," answered the squire; "but stranger still is this: if any knight is guilty of an unworthy deed, the golden name begins at once to fade away, and soon disappears."

"Wonderful!" said Gareth. "But tell me now, who is that handsome knight who sits at the King's right hand?"

"Oh, that is Sir Lancelot, the courtliest and the most gallant of all who sit at the Table Round," answered the squire. "In every tournament he stands first, and he has twice saved the King's life. The King loves him dearly."

"And who is the broad-shouldered, dark-faced knight who sits opposite?"

"That is Sir Pellinore, the mightiest man for strength in all the world. He was once the terror of all good knights. Indeed, he overthrew the King on a time, and would have slain him had it not been for Merlin. But now he is one of the gentlest and faithfullest of Arthur's faithful friends."

Thus the squire pointed out one after another of those who sat at the famous table. He pointed out

Sir Bedivere and Sir Brastias and Sir Ulfius and Sir Baudwin; and he whispered to Gareth the story of old Sir Ector whose seat was vacant that day, for he was sick.

"And who," said Gareth, "are the two young knights who sit at this side of the table and have their backs toward us?"

"They are the sons of old King Lot," answered the squire, "and their names are Sir Gawain and Sir Modred."

"Oh! I think I have heard of them before," said Gareth; and he pulled the collar of his plowboy's coat closer about his chin. "But those two very beautiful chairs that stand opposite the King's and are so richly adorned with gold and gems—I see they are vacant, and they look as though no one has ever sat in them. Why is this so?"

"Because no person has been found who is worthy to sit in them," answered the squire. "The one nearest to us is called the Seat Perilous. It is for the perfect knight, blameless and sinless and brave without compare, when he comes. The other is for that knight whose heart is pure and whose life has ever been free from guile. Should any unworthy knight venture to sit in either of these seats, death would be his doom."

Gareth was about to ask another question when

the squire motioned to him to keep still. A tall knight who seemed to be an officer of the court was approaching, and the eyes of many in the room were turned toward Gareth.

"Beware!" whispered the friendly squire. "It is Sir Kay, the seneschal; and he is coming to see who you are."

It was no wonder that the tall form of Gareth had attracted attention; for, ill-clothed and rustic though he appeared, yet he was the broadest-shouldered and biggest-handed of any man in the hall. And those who looked at him were amazed that a country lad should have so fair a face and so goodly a form.

Sir Kay came forward hastily, and his face was flushed with anger.

"Whom have we here?" he cried. "Is this a place for plowboys, with their slouching manners and their odors of the soil?"

But Gareth answered him gently. "Sir Seneschal," he said, "I have come from the war-wasted land beyond the great forest. There the fields are destroyed, and plowboys have nothing to do. Men told me that here in King Arthur's castle there is need for helpers, and I have come to see about it."

Sir Kay looked at the lad's big arms and strong, kind face, and his anger was softened.

"We are just now in need of a lusty fellow in the

kitchen," he said. "Can you build fires and wash kettles and pans?"

"Try me," answered Gareth. "I am willing to do anything—to serve in the lowliest place—if only I may have food enough and a place to sleep."

"Come then," said Sir Kay. "You shall have work enough and food in plenty, and the humblest place in the kitchen. But what is your name?"

"I cannot tell you," said Gareth.

"You are indeed a wise fellow not to know your own name," said Sir Kay. "But I will give you one. It shall be Beaumains, or Fair-hands; for in all my life I never saw a plowboy with such hands as yours."

By this time they were at the kitchen door, and the seneschal delivered Gareth to the master cook.

"Here," he said, "is Beaumains, a fellow fresh from the fields. Give him a bowl of fat broth every day, and see that he does his fair share of labor. Keep your eye upon him, for I much misdoubt him."


The master cook bowed, and Sir Kay returned to the great hall.

Thus, all for glory, Gareth began to serve the King.



STORY THE THIRTEENTH

THE DISDAINFUL MAIDEN

 ONE day when Sir Lancelot was strolling about the castle, he chanced to look in at the broad open door of the kitchen. He stood there for a while, watching the busy workers who were preparing the noonday meal. Maidens not a few, in white aprons and tucked-up gowns, were tripping hither and thither and carrying eggs and fruit and pitchers of milk and many another sort of food. Young men with bared arms were trussing fowls, and dressing pigs and lambs, and turning fat roasts on the spits before the blazing fires. And directing them all, the master cook strode hither and thither, a pompous fellow greater in his own thoughts than King Arthur himself.

But the person who most attracted Sir Lancelot's notice was a tall youth who went about doing the coarser and heavier work of the place. It was he who carried the water, tended the fires, emptied the slops, and kept the hearths clean. And as he went about his tasks, he had always a pleasant word on his lips or a cheery little song that made ripples of sunshine all around him. The hardest labor was not too hard for him, and to every command he yielded quick and ready obedience. And all the time, this one and that kept crying out, "Beaumains, come hither," "Beaumains, do this," "Beaumains, give us your help."

As Lancelot was returning through the courtyard, he met Sir Kay, the seneschal.

"Who is that strapping young fellow in the kitchen?" he asked.

"The one with the big hands?"

"Yes, and the flaxen hair."

"Oh, he is a beggarly plowboy who came to us a week ago. He had forgotten his name, and so we call him Beaumains. If I mistake not, he is a villain born, and is bent on mischief. My orders are to watch him well."

"Sir Kay," said Lancelot, "you are a good judge of a horse, but you know nothing about men. This Beaumains has all the marks of a gentleman and a

hero, and he will some day prove himself a knight of great worth."

Sir Kay laughed scornfully. "You may as soon make a silver spoon from an iron poker," he said.

But Sir Lancelot, as he walked onward, said to himself, "No man of vile birth had ever so goodly a face as this Beaumains."

And in the great kitchen, Beaumains toiled faithfully every day. He ate from the same dish as the other kitchen boys, and at night he slept with them on the bare floor. In their hours of rest, he was the leader in every merry game, and his laugh was the loudest and cheeriest that was heard.

Sometimes the master cook would give him leave to go to a joust or a tournament, and then there was no happier person in Camelot than he. At times he would take part in some manly trial of strength; and there was not a man who could match him at wrestling or at running or at throwing a weight.

Then Sir Kay would rub his palms together and say, "There! how do you like my kitchen boy?"

And Sir Lancelot, the courteous and the kind, would cry, "Bravo, my lad! Some day you will do even better than that."

So a month passed, and two months, and still Beaumains tended the kitchen fires and was the servant of the master cook. Then one day a mes-

senger from beyond the forest sought him at the kitchen door.

"Have you here a plowboy by the name of Gareth?" he asked.

"The only plowboy here is Beaumains," was the answer.

At this moment the young man himself came forward, and when he saw the messenger he knew him as an old and trusted servant of his mother.

"Gareth," said the man, "I bring you a message from your mother. She is very sad when she thinks of what she has made you endure, and she grieves for you every day. She has sent me to say that she releases you from your promise."

"And shall I serve here no longer?"

"Not unless it pleases you. She has sent to you a suit of armor, the finest that she could buy; and she bids you seek the King and ask him to make you his knight."

"That I will do willingly."

So Beaumains, still clad in his sooty kitchen clothes, went out to seek the King. He found him alone, and told him all.

"Now, Sir King," he said, "will you not make me your knight?"

"Why should I give that honor to one who is untried and so young?" asked Arthur.

"Well, I am not so untried," answered Beaumains. "A year ago, I staggered Sir Gawain in a tilt. Ask him, and he will tell you. Make me your knight, O King, but let it be a secret. Keep my true name hidden till I have done some worthy deed."

The King smiled and seemed to hesitate. Then he said, "I knew all about you even before you came to me, for your mother has been here and told me everything. And now, for her sake, you shall be made knight — but not in secret."

"Oh, why not, Sir King?"

"Because there is one at my Round Table who must witness your being knighted. There are no secrets between that one and me."

"Is it Sir Lancelot? Then let him be present, for he is noble and true. But keep it from all the rest, and let my name still be Beaumains till I have brought honor to the name of Gareth."

So Sir Lancelot was called, and by the King's command he gave to young Beaumains the honor of knighthood. But after the ceremony, Arthur whispered to Sir Lancelot: "He is so young that I fear for him; yet, if he desire it, he shall have the first adventure that is offered. When he rides forth, keep an eye upon him, lest he need help."

"I will do all that," answered Lancelot, "and much more. For I love the young man."

That noon, as King Arthur sat in his hall of justice, a maiden of high degree came and saluted him and asked of him a boon.

"Speak boldly and tell thy name and need," said the King.

"My name is Lynette," she said, "and my need is a knight to ride forth to the help of my sister Lyonors. She is a lady of great renown, and three robber chiefs besiege her castle. They send her word that she must find a champion to fight for her or else they will destroy both her home and herself. It is for this champion that I now ask you, O King."

"Who are these robbers who are so unmannerly and bold?" asked Arthur.

"I know not their true names," answered the damsel Lynette; "but they are brothers, and they have given themselves fanciful names. There are three fords where the river makes a loop about my sister's castle, and each of these robbers guards a ford. The one at the outer ford calls himself Morning Star; the one at the middle ford is known as Noonday Sun; and the other who stands nearest the castle is Evening Star. They are all mighty men, and I doubt if there be any knight who can overthrow them unless it be Sir Lancelot. I pray you, Sir King, send Lancelot to be my sister's champion."

Then, ere the King had framed an answer, Beaumains stepped forward, still clad in his kitchen togger. "A boon, O King, a boon!" he cried.

"What wilt thou have, Beaumains?" asked Arthur.

"Grant me this adventure, for though I am but a kitchen boy, it belongs to me," said Beaumains.

"Thou shalt have it," said Arthur; "I grant it to thee. Make ready, therefore, and ride forth to the overthrow of these shameless robbers."

"Fie! fie!" cried the damsel Lynette. "Is this the way I am insulted at Arthur's court? Am I to have no helper but a vile kitchen boy?"

And with that she turned and fled angrily from the hall. "A kitchen boy, indeed!" she muttered, as she mounted her horse and rode clattering down the street and out through the great white gate.

"Your horse is ready, Beaumains," a voice called; and the young man, looking up, saw King Arthur's own war steed standing at the door. He smiled with joy and loosed the rough blouse and kitchen apron from his neck. Then, like a brilliant butterfly issuing from its dull chrysalis covering, he stepped forth clad in the new armor which his mother had sent him.

How those shouted who saw him! How they threw up their caps and cried, "God save King Arthur and all his mighty fellowship!"

And Beaumains, hastily replacing the blouse,

mounted his steed. Then, holding his head very high, he rode away after the damsel. And all wondered because he carried neither shield nor spear, but only a sword.

"What folly is this?" cried Sir Kay. "There goes my kitchen boy on the king's war steed. I'll follow and bring him back."

"You had better stay at home," said Sir Lancelot.

But Sir Kay made ready quickly, and donned his armor. He took his spear and shield, and mounting a swift horse, rode out in pursuit.

And now the damsel Lynette was riding leisurely over the plain and muttering to herself: "Why did the King scorn me? If Sir Lancelot could not go, he might have sent a less famous knight. But a kitchen boy — oh, fie upon him!"

Soon, however, Beaumains, in his armor and his blouse, overtook her. She knew him by his broad countenance and flaxen hair.

"Lead on, fair damsel," he cried. "The quest is mine, and I will follow you."

"Fie on you, kitchen knave!" cried she. "Come not too near me, for you reek with dishwater and soot and the odor of garbage. But see who comes behind!"

And surely enough, there came Sir Kay, riding madly, as though blind.

"Halt, there!" he cried. "Do you know me? I am Sir Kay, your master. Come, my lad! you are needed in the kitchen to mend the fires."

"You are no longer my master," cried Beaumains. "You are the ungentlest knight in King Arthur's hall, and I bid you ride back to your kitchen with all due haste."

At this, Sir Kay's anger rose. He put his spear in rest and rode fiercely down upon the young man. But Beaumains met him sturdily, with sword in hand. He struck the spear aside and thrust so skillfully at Sir Kay that the sword pierced his armor and gashed his shoulder.

Sir Kay swooned and fell from his horse as though dead; and Beaumains, leaping lightly down, took his shield and spear. Then, seeing that Sir Kay was not badly hurt, he mounted again and rode onward after Lynette.

"Lead on, fair damsel," he cried; and she lashed her steed and fled swiftly away over the uneven plain.

But whenever she paused to look behind her, she saw Beaumains following closely on the King's war steed, his loose blouse flapping in the wind.

"Go back, dishwasher!" she cried. "I want not your company. You smell of the kitchen as before."

"Fair damsel," said Beaumains, "you may scorn

me as you will, but I will not go back till I have finished this quest."

"Only hear the knave!" said Lynette, mockingly. "He talks of a quest as though he thought himself a knight."

Then in her anger she lashed her steed again and sped onward, leaving the open plain behind, and dashing into the deep wild woods.

Thus they rode without pausing until the sun had sloped far down towards the west and the evening shadows were lengthening. Then the damsel suddenly halted.

"Sir Dishwasher," she said, "I have missed the way, and I fear we are lost here in the wood. We shall likely meet with robbers, and you must fight if you would ever escape."

"Lead on, fair damsel, and I will follow," said Beaumains.

So onward they rode, but slowly, through the darkening woods, until they met a man running with all his might.

"Whither are you going so fast?" cried Beaumains.

"O Sir Stranger," answered the man, "come quickly and help me. For just at the bend of the road there are six thieves who have taken my master and bound him. I fear they will kill him."

Beaumains, dashing forward with what speed he could, beheld a knight lying upon the ground with three ruffians standing over him. Fiercely he charged with his steed, and the thieves fled in great fright. Soon he overtook them, and though they fought furiously, he left them, every one, bleeding and helpless on the ground. Then he rode back and unbound the knight.

"I thank you, Sir Stranger," said the knight, "for you have saved my life, and I am much beholden to you. Ride, now, home with me to my castle, which is close at hand, and I will reward you."

"Sir," said Beaumains, "I will take no reward. But if this lady is willing, we will spend the night with you in your castle; for it is plain there is no safety in these dark woods."

"Come, then," said the knight, "you shall have safe shelter, and such cheer as I can give you."

Then, as they rode along, he said to Beaumains, "I can well believe that you are of King Arthur's Table."

At that, the damsel Lynette lightly laughed. "Yes, truly, he is of the King's table," she said, "for he works in the kitchen."

It was toward midnight when they passed out of the wood, and at the top of a hill came to a gray castle with towers and high-built walls.

"This is my home. Welcome to all that is in it," said the knight, as he led them in.

In the feast hall a supper was already spread, and the knight invited his guests to sit down and eat. But quickly the damsel sprang up and cried: "Why am I thus insulted? What have I done that I must sit at the same table with a kitchen boy?"

The knight was puzzled. He knew not what to do. He could only stammer, "Why? Why? How so?"

Then Lynette told him of all that had happened that day, and how, when she had asked for Sir Lancelot, the King had given her the kitchen boy to go upon her quest. "The King is surely mad," she said, "and I am made to suffer such insolence as few of gentle birth could bear."

The knight listened with gentle patience to all she said, and then seated Beaumains at another table.

"Friend," he said, "I know not what you are, nor whether it is the King or the maiden that is mad; but let me advise you. Go no farther in this quest, but ride back to Camelot and let Sir Lancelot be the champion of the oppressed young lady. For you are young and you know not the power of those robber knights whom you would meet."

But Beaumains thanked him and said, "I will not go back to Camelot till I have finished this quest."

So, when the morning was come, Beaumains and the damsel made ready to renew their journey. As they rode out through the castle gate, the young man said, as before, "Lead on, fair maiden, and I will follow."

And she spitefully answered: "Yes, I will, but not far. For the first ford is near at hand, and Morning Star is there to cut your journey short."

She spoke truly, in part, for soon they came to a river and a place where the water flowed in shallow ripples over its stony bed. They paused on the bank, and Beaumains saw on the farther side a white tent with gayly colored banners floating over it. A rough-looking knight wearing a silken suit of blue and crimson and gold was walking leisurely upon the bank.

"Hail, Morning Star!" cried Lynette.

"Hail, fair damsel," was the answer. "Have you brought that champion from Arthur's hall?"

"No, Morning Star," said she. "The King has scorned you, and has sent one of his kitchen boys to fight with you. See you how big he is? Be careful, or he may fall on you and crush you."

The robber knight laughed loudly, and then called out to his servants to come and arm him.

"Bring my best armor," he cried, "for here is a kitchen boy whom I must meet in battle."

Forthwith three girls gorgeously clad in rose-red raiment came out of the tent. One carried his coat of mail, one his helmet, and one his shield and spear. At the same time a nimble dwarf ran quickly by another way to bring his horse.

Soon the robber knight was arrayed in sky-blue armor; and as he leaped upon his steed, they gave him his shield, which was also blue with a golden star in its center. Right proudly he rode up and down the river bank, while the maidens, rosy-red, and the dwarf, attired in garments golden-yellow, ran by his side. Beaumains looked and wondered; for he seemed to see a living picture of the morning star and the blue sky and the rosy and golden dawn.

Then the damsel Lynette cried tauntingly, "Turn thy horse, Sir Dishwasher, and flee quickly, ere he sends his dwarf across the stream to slay thee!"

The speech so angered Beaumains that he grasped his spear and rode right forward into the shallow ford.

"Halt, there, low-born knave!" cried Morning Star. "Come no farther, but leave your steed and arms on the river bank and make all speed back to the King's kitchen."

But Beaumains, heeding him not, rode onward. Then the robber knight, in anger, spurred his horse

into the ford, and the two rushed toward each other with fiery speed. They met in midstream. Their spears clashed, each upon the other's shield, with thunderous force. Both knights were hurled into the rushing water, but quickly rose and drew their swords.

Then it was that Beaumains showed his skill. Standing waist deep in the flood, he drove his enemy before him to the shore, where with one deft stroke he laid him helpless on the ground.

"Oh, spare me! spare my life! I yield," the fallen robber cried.

"I will spare thee if this damsel ask it of me," said Beaumains.

Then Lynette cried, "Who am I that I should ask a favor of you, Sir Dishwasher?"

Beaumains unlaced the robber's helmet; he raised his sword to strike.

"Oh, slay him not before my eyes!" cried Lynette.

"Maiden, I spare him," said Beaumains. "Knight, you owe your life to her. Arise, and leave your sky-blue armor and your spotless shield with me. Now, hasten to King Arthur's court and tell him that his kitchen boy has sent you."

The robber knight, bruised and bleeding and sore in every joint, obeyed. And Beaumains, with the blue armor and the shield flung over his horse's neck,

followed Lynette across the ford. The rose-red maidens and the yellow dwarf had fled, and a gust of wind had leveled the white tent to the ground.

"Lead on, fair damsel, and I will follow," said Beaumains.

She urged her steed and fled swiftly down the deserted road. But as Beaumains kept ever close behind her, she turned and said, "I think you lost some of your kitchen odors when you struck down the Morning Star, but they are still too strong. Fall back a little, and keep your distance."

So they rode on until they reached the second river ford. There, on the bank, a red-haired knight on a huge red horse paced up and down. He paused when he saw Beaumains, and cried, "Who are you that dare trespass where the Noonday Sun holds sway?"

And Lynette answered, "This is Sir Dishwasher, whom King Arthur has sent from his kitchen to fight with you."

"With me? with me?" muttered the lubberly Sun. "Then let him beware of my hot beams;" and with that he couched his spear and dashed upon Beaumains. But at this ford the water ran swift and wild, and the steeds could scarcely stem the stream. The Sun, leaning forward to strike, lost his balance and fell into the rushing flood.

His heavy armor held him down, and had not Beaumains helped him out, he surely would have been drowned.

"Your beams are quenched, Sir Sun," said Beaumains. "Yield, or suffer yourself to perish."

"Spare me! I yield," murmured the red-haired knight.

"Then leave your arms and shield with me, and hasten to Arthur's court. Give yourself up as a prisoner, and wait till I return."

Glad was the knight to escape so easily; and Beaumains hung his red shield upon his horse's neck beneath the blue of Morning Star.

"Lead on, fair damsel," he cried, "and I will follow."

So they rode onward over the meadows and through shadowy groves until they came to the third bend in the river. There the stream was spanned by a narrow bridge, and at the farther end of the bridge the third robber knight stood waiting.

"Hail, Evening Star!" cried Lynette. "Arm thee, for both thy brothers have gone down before this youth, and so wilt thou!"

Then the knight blew upon a horn, and forth from a wretched hut beside the road, an old and grizzled dame came hobbling. In her hands she carried a suit of armor, well-scarred and rusted, and

in this the Evening Star arrayed himself. Slowly, as one whose limbs have failed him, he took his tarnished shield and his time-worn spear, while Beaumains dismounted from his steed.

“Defend thyself!” each cried to the other, and the two met at the middle of the bridge.

Then was there fighting such as any knight of the Round Table would have gloried in. Back and forth, back and forth, they drove each other, striking with their swords. And now the victory seemed to be with Beaumains, and now with Evening Star, and now they stood and panted and glared at each other like fierce beasts of the woods.

The damsel Lynette stood at the end of the bridge, watching; and when Beaumains seemed to be gaining, she cheered him with words of courage.

“Well done, Sir Champion, thou art worthy to sit at the Table Round!”

And when he seemed almost beaten, she cried in pleading tones, “Oh, fail me not, Sir Champion, but strike, strike, strike!”

Beaumains struck with all his might, but with the blow his sword broke short off below the hilt.

“I have thee now!” cried Evening Star.

But Beaumains, with a sudden, swift movement, rushed upon him and seized him in his strong arms and pitched him headlong into the roaring, rushing



(159) BUT BEAUMAINS SEIZED HIM IN HIS STRONG ARMS

stream below. Then panting and all a-tremble, he mounted his horse and said to Lynette, "Lead on, fair damsel, and I will follow."

"Sir," said Lynette, "no more will I call you a kitchen boy, a dishwasher, or a knave; for now I know that you are a knight and one well worthy, too. Pardon my rudeness, for when I was most ill-mannered you were always courteous and meek and slow to anger, as King Arthur's knights are taught to be."

"I thank you, fair damsel," said Beaumains, "and I blame you not. Your taunts helped me even more than fair words could have done."

So now, side by side, they rode onward through the leafy woods. But while yet the towers of Lynette's castle were still far away, they suddenly heard a voice calling from behind. They turned and saw a knight on horseback riding fiercely towards them.

"Halt there, robber!" cried the stranger. "You have slain my friend, and I will avenge him."

Beaumains drew up his steed and waited for the stranger's onset. With his shield he parried the stranger's spear, and then threw himself from his saddle into the tall grass beside the road. And as he lay there he laughed loudly and shouted, "O Sir Lancelot, would you avenge me on myself?"

Then Lancelot, for it was he, turned and rode back; and as he saw Beaumains lying in the grass with his helmet removed, he also laughed.

“O Sir Gareth,” he said, “what happy fortune is this! I followed you from the court; for King Arthur had whispered that you might have need of me. I saw you overturn Sir Kay, and it served him right. But I lost you as you were passing through the wood. Then, after long searching, I came to the road which we are now following. I saw the prints of horses’ feet, and I hurried to overtake them. Presently, I saw a knight and a lady riding before me. I knew the lady, and, as the knight carried a sky-blue shield with a golden star in the center, I thought I knew him also. I guessed he was the robber knight of the first ford, and since he was astride of your horse, I felt sure that he had killed my friend Beaumains. You know the rest, Sir Gareth.”

“And I thank you for taking so good care of me, Sir Lancelot,” laughed Beaumains.

“Well, I shall ride home and tell the King that you need no help and are amply able to take care of yourself. And for my hasty zeal to avenge you, I ask your pardon, Sir Gareth.”

“Sir Gareth? Sir Gareth?” queried the damsel Lynette. “Why ‘Sir Gareth’ to him?”

"Yes, Sir Gareth," answered Lancelot; "for this young knight who has befriended you is Sir Gareth, the son of King Lot of the Orkneys."

Then was it that Lynette blushed and stammered and knew not what to say, so great was her confusion. But Sir Gareth, now no longer Beaumains, laughed and lightly passed the matter by. And the three rode happily onward, the maiden in the middle of the path and a knight on either side.

"Welcome, welcome, Sir Lancelot," said the Lady Lyonors; "and welcome, thrice welcome, Sir Gareth!"

And Lynette blushinglly echoed her sister's words, "Welcome, thrice welcome, Sir Gareth!"

Now I know not how long Sir Gareth tarried in the white castle, which was thereafter called the Castle Perilous; but when at length he rode back to Camelot, the Lady Lynette rode back with him as his wife, and there was great joy at the Table Round.



STORY THE FOURTEENTH

THE MAKING OF A KNIGHT

IN the midst of the Forest of the Seven Dragons, far from the court of King Arthur, there was a little hut, and in the hut there dwelt a lady who had once been a queen. The name of this lady was Herzeleide. Her husband had been a man of great valor, a lover of knight-hood and of war. But lawless men had slain him and had destroyed his once fair kingdom.

When Queen Herzeleide fled into the forest, she took with her her little son Percival, a child but twelve months of age. And with her went also an old serving man and his wife who had sworn to be faithful and true, no matter what might betide.

“Say nothing to the child about knighthood or

war," she commanded them. "Tell him naught about castles or kings, or about the wicked world from which we have escaped. But let him grow up here in innocence, with the birds and small beasts for his playmates. For I would not have him become a man of war like his father."

So Percival lived and grew up in the wild wood, and saw no human beings save his mother and the two old servants. He loved the trees and the flowers, the blue sky, the summer clouds, and the great sun; and his only playmates were the timid creatures of the forest. His mother taught him many things that a man must know. She taught him how noble it is to be dutiful and true; and she showed him how to exercise his body and become manly and strong. But she told him nothing about knights, or armor, or jousting, or war. She allowed him to believe that the little hut which he called home was the only place in the world worth thinking about. So he was happy and grew fast; and at fifteen years of age he was as strong and comely a lad as ever was seen.

One day as he was standing near the door of his home, a knight came riding by. Percival watched him as he passed. He was clad in red armor and carried a red shield, and his horse was arrayed in trappings of gold. The boy had never seen any-

thing so grand; and as the knight galloped swiftly away, he cried out:—

“Mother, what is that beautiful thing? Is it a man? Or is it some sort of strange beast?”

“It is a man on horseback, my child.”

“But why is he dressed so beautifully, and whither is he riding?”

“How should I know?” said his mother. “You should have asked him as he passed.”

The next day as Percival was hunting in the woods, he met the same knight.

“Oh, sir,” he cried, “my dear mother told me to ask you something.”

The knight was amused at the appearance of the boy, and he stopped to listen. Percival went boldly up to him and put his hand on the horse’s neck.

“I should like to know why you are dressed so beautifully,” he said. “My dear mother told me to ask you.”

The stranger laughed loudly. “Well, I am a knight,” he answered, “and all knights dress in this way.”

“What do knights do?” asked Percival.

“Oh, they ride out to seek adventures. They help those who are in trouble, they protect women and children, and they fight for the King.”

"How grand that must be! I will tell my dear mother, and perhaps she will let me be a knight."

"Truly, I hope she will," said the stranger.

"I like your horse," said Percival. "He is more beautiful than our little gray nag at home. Won't you give him to me?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that," said the stranger; "for I am riding to King Arthur's court, and I will need him there."

"Who is King Arthur?"

"He is the grandest knight and the noblest king in the world, and all the heroes in Britain are proud to serve him."

"I should like to serve him," said Percival, "and I will tell my dear mother so. But I have no horse nor beautiful clothes."

The stranger laughed again. "Well, I promise you," he said, "that when I have no longer any need for this red armor or for this noble horse, they shall be yours."

"I thank you," answered Percival, "and I will tell my dear mother what you have said."

The stranger rode swiftly away through the wood, and the boy hastened home to his mother.

"Dear mother," he cried, "I want to be a knight!"

Lady Herzeleide knew not what to think. Her heart was filled with sorrow and alarm.

"Oh, Percival, my child!" she said. "What do you know about being a knight?"

"I know a great deal," he answered. "I have just seen one, and he told me all about it. He told me about King Arthur, the grandest of all men. And he promised me his beautiful horse and his red armor when he is done with them."

"But you must not be a knight," said his mother; "for knights must venture into all sorts of danger, and sooner or later they are killed in battle or by treachery. You are safest here in the forest."

"You need not be afraid for me, dear mother. I will not be killed."

Lady Herzeleide's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, my boy," she said, "would you go away and leave me here all alone?"

"I will not go till my dear mother gives me leave," said Percival; "but then, I should so much like to be a knight."

Every day after that, the constant plea of the lad was, "Dear mother, I should so much like to be a knight."

The mother heard this with ever lessening pain and ever growing pride. "Shall I keep him here to be a dull laborer in the woods and fields?" she asked herself; "or shall I let him go out to win glory among men?" And when she looked at his

tall form and his straight, long limbs, she thought to herself, "What a fine figure he would be on horseback in the tourney or on the battlefield!"

Soon, therefore, her pride in him grew stronger than selfish fears, and she said to him, "Percival, your father was a knight and a king."

"I have always thought so, dear mother," said he, "and I should so much like to be a knight also."

"Well, then," she answered, "I will grant that you may have your heart's desire. To-morrow you may go and find Arthur's court and ask the King to make you one of his knights."

"I thank you, dear mother," said Percival, and he kissed her through her tears.

So, the next day, he set out to find the court of King Arthur. He was dressed in a strange suit made up of such odd bits of cloth as his mother could find. His coat was blue with various stripes and squares of yellow and gray; and his trousers were a patchwork of many colors. His feet were bare, and on his head he wore a cap of fur which he himself had made. And his only arms were a bow and arrows which the old serving man had made for him.

"Good-by, dear mother," he said, "When you see me again, I shall be a knight."

"Good-by, sweet son," she said. "Remember

what I have taught you. Be always truthful and brave, and love others better than yourself."

"I will remember, dear mother," he answered.

He leaped lightly astride of the little gray nag, and rode away through the shadowy wood. He did not know whether to go north or south or east or west to find King Arthur's court; but he trusted to meet some one who could direct him.

For a long time he rode, and still the great forest hemmed him in. Night came. He tied the gray nag to a tree, and gathered an armload of grass for it to eat. He opened his wallet and took therefrom a bit of brown bread which his mother's care had provided for him. When he had eaten this, he lay down upon a bed of leaves to sleep.

"My dear mother is thinking of me now," he said.

Early in the morning he renewed his journey. The sun was shining bright, and the birds were singing in every tree. Percival was very happy. "I shall soon be a knight," he said.

In a short time he came to a road which led him out of the forest. Before him he saw a green meadow, and not far away were three white tents with a little red banner floating from the top of each.

"Perhaps there is some one here who can tell me the way," he said.

So he alighted and looked around him; but he

saw no person. "They must be inside the tents," he thought. So he lifted the curtain of the first tent and went boldly in. There, on a couch, he saw a young woman fast asleep. She was very richly dressed, and Percival thought that she was almost as beautiful as his mother.

"She looks like a rare flower sleeping in a bed of roses," he said to himself; and he bent over and kissed her.

The lady awoke, and when she saw the strangely clad boy at her side, she was very angry, and scolded him severely.

"Oh, do not be angry," he said. "I have often kissed my mother when I have caught her napping, and you are almost as beautiful as she."

The lady was astonished at the simplicity of the lad. "I will forgive you if you will tell me who you are," she said.

Then he sat down beside her, and, as though talking to his mother, he told her all about his life in the forest, and how he wished to be a knight, and how he was now on his way to King Arthur's court.

When he had finished talking, she told him which way he must go and how he should behave himself on the road. "And be sure not to kiss any other lady without her leave."

"But I often kiss my dear mother without asking her," he said.

At that moment, a huntsman's horn was heard in the distance.

"That is my husband coming home from the hunt," cried the lady. "Hasten away, for he might do you harm if he found you here."

"Oh, I am not afraid," said Percival. "Here is my bow, and here are a dozen sharp arrows. I could defend myself."

But he hastened to remount the little gray nag; and whistling a merry air he went ambling away across the broad meadow.

Day after day he traveled as the lady had directed, and of every one he met he inquired, "Is this the road to King Arthur's court?"

Some answered him kindly and truly; but many derided him, and for pure wickedness sent him the wrong way. And all wondered and were amused at his homely garb and the poor, lean, gray nag that carried him. Sometimes he passed the night in the open air, with naught but the sky and the stars above him. Oftener, however, he was entertained and fed by the poor folk along the road; and to all of these he said, —

"I thank you, for my dear mother's sake."

One day at the crossing of a river, near the foot

of a hill, he met a red-haired knight dressed in red armor and riding a sorrel horse. He was sure that the horse and the armor were the same that he had seen near his mother's hut in the forest, but the knight was quite another person — churlish, and rude, and no whit of a gentleman.

"I like the horse that you are riding," said Percival, "and I like your beautiful armor."

"And well you may," answered the red-haired man, "for I had a hard fight to win them. It was only yesterday that I took them from one of King Arthur's knights, whom I slew."

"King Arthur?" said Percival. "Well, I am going to see King Arthur, and I hope that for my dear mother's sake he will make me one of his knights. Please lend me your horse and your armor, so that I may go to him in becoming style."

The red-haired knight laughed loudly, and said to himself, "This rustic fool is just the fellow to carry my challenge to Arthur." Then he answered Percival, "I cannot lend you my horse and armor, but if you will take a message to the King, I promise you shall soon have your pick of good steeds and coats of mail."

"I will oblige you in any way that I can," said Percival; "for my dear mother has always told me to serve others rather than myself."

"Then," said the knight, "carry this cup to Arthur and tell him that I challenge him and all of his Round Table to meet me in deadly combat."

Percival took the cup and rode onward, but he glanced back often at the churlish knight and his fine sorrel horse. At the next turning of the road



he lifted his eyes and saw before him the dream towers and lofty battlements of Arthur's city shining white in the morning sun.

He rode onward, full of courage and high hope, and soon entered the city. Up through the fine old street he passed, moving slowly and gazing, on this

side and on that, at the beautiful houses and the many strange and wonderful sights. He looked so uncouth, in his motley garb and on his shabby steed, that those who saw him laughed, and the boys of the street hooted and threw stones at him.

"Will you not show me the way to King Arthur's castle?" he asked of a squire who was passing. "I have a message for him."

"I will do so right gladly," said the squire, whose name was Evanet. "Follow me."

So Percival followed him to the courtyard, where he dismounted from the gray nag and brushed the dust from his clothing.

"My dear mother told me that I must be neat and clean when I go before the King," he said.

Then Evanet led him into the great hall where Arthur and his knights were seated at the Table Round. The poor boy's eyes were dazzled by the brilliancy and beauty of the place; and when he saw the knights arrayed in their rich attire, all sparkling with gold and gems, he turned to the squire and said: "I did not know there were so many Arthurs. My dear mother told me of only one."

"True, there is only one," said Evanet. "The knight who has long yellow hair and wears a crown on his head — that is King Arthur."

Percival, without waiting for another word, went boldly forward and bowed to the King.

"May it please you, Sir King," he said, "here is a cup which the red-haired knight at the foot of the hill desired me to give you. He has a fine horse and a beautiful suit of red armor, and he says he will fight with you and all your Round Table if you will."

"I know of no such knight," said the King, "unless it be the fellow who once called himself Noon-day Sun."

"Well, he is there at the foot of the hill," said Percival. "And won't you please give me his horse and his armor?"

The knights who were standing near by laughed, and Sir Kay said, "The boy is asking for the bear-skin before the beast is in sight."

But Arthur answered him kindly and said: "I will gladly give them to you. Go and get them, if you can."

"Thank you, Sir King," said Percival. "I shall need your gift when I become a knight. My dear mother will be pleased to hear of your kindness."

With that, he bowed and went out of the hall.

"That lad will be a rare good knight if he lives," said the King. "He has more grace and courage than many a man who carries a shield and spear."

Percival did not loiter a moment. He remounted the little nag and rode out through the courtyard and down the sloping street and out of the city gate without looking either to the right or to the left. The town boys again hooted at him and threw stones at the nag, but he paid no heed to them. He held his head up and went onward down the hill road to the place where he had left the red-haired knight.

The fellow was still there.

"Are you the one who calls himself Noonday Sun?" asked Percival.

"No matter what I call myself," said the churlish knight. "Did you deliver my message?"

"I did," answered Percival, "and the King gave me your horse and armor. So, dismount and let me have them at once."

"What did you say, little one?" asked the knight.

"The horse and armor are mine. So dismount and let me take them," repeated Percival.

"Insolent fool!" answered the knight; and with that he struck Percival with the butt of his spear and knocked him off his nag.

The next moment, however, the boy was on his feet. And now the great strength and skill which he had gained through his temperate life in the woods were brought into use. He seized the red knight's spear

with his hands and wrenched it away; then he gave the astonished fellow a blow which hurled him into the dusty road, where he lay bleeding and senseless.

"The horse and the armor are mine, for they have been twice given to me," said Percival. "The knight in the forest promised them to me, and the King bade me come and get them."

Then he stripped the fallen knight of his coat of mail; he took his helmet and his shield; and with these in his arms he led the steed away to a retired place by the roadside. There he tried to array himself in the armor; but in this he would have failed, had not Evanet, the squire, chanced to be passing that way.

"I will help you, Sir Knight of the Red Shield," said Evanet.

So, in a little while, Percival was fully armed; and as he sat erect and proud upon his fine sorrel steed, he said, "How proud my dear mother would be if she could see me now!"

"If you will allow me, Sir Knight," said Evanet "I will gladly be your squire."

"I am not yet a knight," answered Percival, "but I hope to become one soon."

"Then," said Evanet, "come with me, and I will lead you to a man who will teach you how to be a true knight."

So, instead of returning to Camelot, Percival followed Evanet to a small castle far away by the great marsh, where dwelt Sir Gurneman, an old and most worthy knight.

"Welcome, my son!" said Sir Gurneman. "Come in and tarry with me, for this is a lonely place, where I seldom see the face of a friend."

Percival alighted, and Evanet took charge of his horse and armor. Sir Gurneman was so kind and cordial that he soon won the boy's heart; and before the evening had passed, Percival had told him all about his mother and about his journey to the court of King Arthur. Then the old knight talked to him long about the heroes at Arthur's court, and about many a knightly deed and brave achievement.

"Stay here with me a few days, and I will tell you much more," he said.

So Percival tarried there for a whole month, and Sir Gurneman taught him how to become a true and worthy knight.

"Do not talk always about your mother," he said; "but honor her in deeds rather than in words. Remember her teaching, always. Be modest and never boastful. Tell the truth. Help the oppressed. Show kindness to all. Be merciful to your conquered foes. And remember that to face death bravely is the hero's glory."

"All these things I will remember," said Percival.

Then Sir Gurneman brought out a full suit of clothes of finest cloth, most richly adorned with lace and delicate embroidery. "Now lay aside those oddly made garments which you wear, and array yourself in a garb more suitable to a knight," he said.

"Do you call these garments oddly made?" said Percival. "Why, my dear mother made them, and I honor her by wearing them."

"But you will honor her even more by wearing these beautiful clothes that are so becoming to you," said the knight.

And so, after a time, Percival consented to the change; and when he stood before Sir Gurneman and the squire, arrayed in his new attire, they thought they had never seen a knight so comely in form and so graceful in every movement.

Then Sir Gurneman instructed him in the arts which every knight should know. He taught him how to wear his armor, and how to sit on his steed gracefully, and how to hold his shield properly, and how to wield his spear and sword when charging upon an enemy. The young man learned so rapidly and became so skillful that the old warrior's heart was stirred with love and admiration.

"I would gladly have you stay with me and be my son," he said, "but such is not your destiny."

So at length, on a midsummer day, Percival put on his red armor, and with his red shield dangling from his saddle bow, he set out on his return to King Arthur's court. And Evanet, the squire, followed him, carrying a secret letter from Sir Gurneman to the King.



STORY THE FIFTEENTH

THE FLOWER OF KNIGHTHOOD



OW at the court of King Arthur there was a little girl who had never been known to speak or to smile. Her friends had done everything to amuse her; they had played all sorts of funny tricks in her presence; they had told her all manner of laughable stories; but do what they would, her face always bore a look that was both solemn and sad, and she spoke never a single word.

"Let her alone," said Merlin; "she will not speak nor smile until she has seen the flower of knighthood, and then she will be merry enough."

One morning, when she was in the hall with King Arthur and Queen Guinevere and Sir Kay and other knights and ladies, she suddenly burst out laughing most joyously. Then, while all in the

room were wondering, there suddenly appeared at the door a young man clad in rose-red armor. He was tall and comely in form, and his face was pleasant to see.

The little maiden's face was radiant with smiles, and she ran forward and welcomed him most cordially to King Arthur's hall.

"This must be the flower of knighthood," said Sir Lancelot, "for the child both laughs and speaks."

But Sir Kay was angered, and thrust the child roughly aside. "Why do you smile on this stranger," he said, "seeing that you have never smiled on any of your friends?"

Then the stranger came boldly in and said to the King: "My name is Percival, and I am not yet a knight. My mother told me that if I was truthful and brave, you would give me that honor. Therefore, please make me one of your knights."

Arthur scanned his face closely, and then remembered him as the lad who had come so strangely before him in the spring and asked for the red knight's horse and armor. He was about to speak, when Evanet came forward and handed him the letter which Sir Gurneman had written. He opened it and handed it to his clerk to read. It was short and ran thus: —

"Sir Gurneman sends greeting to his lord King Arthur, and assures him that the young man Percival is in every way worthy of knighthood."

"It is well," said the King. "We will at once confer the honor of knighthood upon this young stranger."

And so, in the great hall, in the presence of the bravest men and the most beautiful women in the world, Percival received the desire of his heart.

"Arise, Sir Percival," said the King. "Be ever true to thy mother, for thou lovest her. Be loyal to the King. Be obedient to God's commands. Be now and always the flower of chivalry."

Then, as the hour for the noonday banquet had come, Sir Kay approached and said, "Sir King, at what table shall we provide a seat for this new knight so lately arrived?"

The King answered, "He is young and untried; therefore give him a place in the outer hall with the knights of lesser rank."

Thereupon the little smiling maid who had heretofore been so silent came forward and took Sir Percival by the hand. "Come, noble youth and God's brave knight! Come with me," she said, in a voice as sweet as that of a silver bell, but so loud that all the knights heard it.

Then she led him to the Table Round, and to the seat on the right-hand side of the Seat Perilous.

“Fair knight,” she said, “sit here; for this seat belongs to you, and to none other.” And immediately the words, “*Here ought Sir Percival to sit,*” shone out in golden letters upon the seat. Then the King and his knights made great joy for the young stranger who had come among them.

Now the Feast of Pentecost was nigh at hand, and great were the preparations made to celebrate it in a becoming manner. For Merlin had long ago foretold that at such a feast the knight would come who should sit in the Seat Perilous. But many years had passed since that prophecy, and many times had Pentecost come round, and still the seat was vacant.

But on the day of the knighting of Sir Percival a wonderful thing occurred. For as Sir Percival sat at meat with the King and his fellowship of the Round Table, he was suddenly aware of a light shining forth from the Seat Perilous. He looked, and there in letters of living gold he saw these words:—

“Four hundred winters and fifty-four after the Passion of Our Lord, this seat ought to be filled.”

When King Arthur and his knights saw this writing, they were greatly amazed. “This is a marvelous thing!” they cried.

Then they called Merlin and asked him what year that was. And he answered, "This is the year of Our Lord, four hundred and fifty-four."

"Then," said Sir Lancelot, "this seat ought to be filled at the Feast of Pentecost, which is even now at hand. Let not this writing be seen again until that perfect knight who is to sit here has come."

So they covered the seat with a cloth of silk, so that none might read the writing that was on it.

At length the day of the great festival came, and King Arthur and his knights waited in the outer chamber. For it was an old custom that on this day they should not go in to the banquet until they had seen some great wonder or accomplished some worthy adventure.

Presently, as they waited, Evanet the squire came hastily in. "If you would see a wonder," he said, "come quickly with me to the river."

They hastened to follow him; and as they stood upon the bank and looked towards the spot which Evanet pointed out, they saw that which filled them with astonishment. For there, in the midst of the water, a great block of red marble was floating, and in the marble a sword was thrust almost to the hilt.

As the knights looked they saw that the hilt of the sword was set thick with precious stones, and that on one side was this inscription:—

"NO MAN SHALL DRAW ME HENCE, BUT ONLY HE BY WHOSE SIDE I MUST HANG; AND HE MUST BE THE BEST KNIGHT IN THE WORLD."

"Sir Lancelot," said the King, "put your hand to the hilt and draw forth the sword; for surely you are the best knight in the world."

"Ah, no," said Lancelot; "if you did but know me better, you would not say so. The sword is not for me."

Then Arthur turned to Sir Gawain and bade him make the trial.

"I will try, because you desire it," said the knight; but although he strained with all his might, the blade stirred not.

"Perhaps our newly made knight can achieve the weapon," said Arthur. "Let him see what he can do."

Then Sir Percival, trembling and hesitating, went forward. "I obey you, Sir King," he said; "but I know that the sword is not for me, for I am not the best knight in the world."

He took hold of the jeweled hilt and pulled; but with all his strength he was unable to move it.

So the knights knew that the adventure was for none of them, and they returned to the Table Round with the King.

Scarcely were they seated, each in his place, when

a great roaring was heard, and all the doors and windows were closed, and the hall was lighted up as though by a thousand candles. The knights sat still and wondered, and none of them could speak or move. And as each looked at the others, he saw them as he had never seen them before, for their faces were most wonderfully lighted up, and even their most secret thoughts were pictured therein.

Presently, as the light became dimmer, the windows opened of themselves; and as the sun shone again into the great hall, the knights regained their courage.

“Fair fellows and lords,” said the King, “we have seen great wonders; but we shall see still greater before the sun goes down.”

At that moment the door was opened and an aged man, white-bearded and clothed all in white, came into the hall. By his side there walked a young knight clad partly in armor with an empty scabbard hanging from his belt. At the sight of this knight, all who were at the table were filled with amazement, and with one accord they rose to their feet. For he was very young,—almost a child,—and his face was the most beautiful that any of them had ever beheld.

“Peace be with you, fair lords,” said the aged man. Then turning to King Arthur he said: “Sir,

I bring you here a young knight of kingly lineage, the best that is in the world. His name is Galahad, and he is the son of that one whom you esteem the best of all your fair fellowship, Sir Lancelot."

The King knew not what to say, but he turned to Sir Lancelot and said: "Is this true? Is the young man indeed your son?"

"It is indeed true," answered the knight, and he ran forward and kissed Sir Galahad and welcomed him. Then he said to the King and his fellowship: "I will tell you the truth, as all knights are sworn to do. When I came over the sea to offer myself to King Arthur, I left behind me in France this son of mine, who was then only a babe. His mother reared him most tenderly at the court of my father, King Pelles, and never did she permit him to touch or taste or hear or see aught that would harm his pure and gentle heart. Yesterday, word came to me that he was waiting at the abbey of white nuns which, you know, is not far away. I hastened to go and see him; and there, in the abbey, I made him a knight."

Then all who were of the Table Round were very joyful, both for Sir Lancelot's sake and because of the new knight who had come among them. King Arthur also rejoiced, and he welcomed Sir Galahad right heartily; and turning to the others, he said



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"HIS NAME IS GALAHAD."

softly, "God make him a good man; for in beauty and gentleness there is none like him."

By this time the whole castle was astir with the news of the young knight's arrival, and Queen Guinevere cried, "Let me go and see him; for he must needs be a lovely and gallant knight like his father."

And with that, she and her ladies hastened into the hall to bid him welcome.

"How like his father he looks!" said some.

"How demure and gentle he is!" said others.

"He has such a face," said the Queen, "that I am sure he has never known a wicked thought."

When they had all saluted him and bidden him welcome, the aged man in white took him by the hand and said, "Come, now, Sir Galahad, and let us find a place for thee."

He led him straight to the Seat Perilous. He lifted the silken covering that was over it. There, in letters of living light, the astonished knights saw these words:—

"This is the seat of the noble prince Galahad."

Straightway and without fear, the young man seated himself where none other had dared to sit; and immediately the great hall was filled with the sound of music sweeter than had ever been heard, and a voice said, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

"Surely," said King Arthur, "this is he that shall achieve the Holy Grail."

"The Holy Grail!" said Sir Percival, who was standing near. "What is the Holy Grail?"

"Is it possible that you do not know?" said the aged man in white. "Is it possible that you, whose ancestors were charged with the keeping of the Holy Grail, do not know what it is?"

"I have never been told," answered Percival, "and therefore how can I know?"

"Then I will tell you," said the aged man. "The Holy Grail is the blessed cup from which Our Lord drank at the Last Supper. A long time ago it was brought to the land of Britain and placed in the keeping of holy men; but because of the world's wickedness it is now hidden from sight, and the place of its concealment is unknown. Nevertheless, the pure in heart may find it and see it and be blessed by it."

"Oh, that I might see it!" cried Percival.

"And oh, that I might see it!" cried many another knight.

Then all sat down to the feast. But the aged man in white had disappeared.



STORY THE SIXTEENTH

THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT QUEST

WHEN the feast was ended, and the knights had risen from the table, King Arthur said to Sir Galahad, "Come now with me to the river side, and I will show you a wonderful sight."

So they went down to the river, and many of the knights and ladies of the court followed them. There they saw the block of red marble still floating in the stream, and the jewel-hilted sword thrust into it the half of its length.

"That is a rare good weapon," said Sir Galahad.

"It is indeed a blade of great worth," answered the King. "Methinks it is waiting there for its rightful owner."

Sir Galahad went closer and read the inscription

upon it. Then he said, "I am in need of a sword for my empty scabbard. Shall I not take this one?"

"You may try what you can do," answered the King; "but it will yield to no one save the best knight in the world."

Then Sir Galahad waded out into the stream; he took hold of the sword and drew upon it lightly;



and lo, it leaped forth from its place in the heart of the stone. For a moment the young hero held it aloft, admiring its sun-bright edge and its sparkling hilt; then he slipped it quietly into the scabbard at his side.

The knights who were watching him from the

river bank shouted their applause, and the ladies clapped their hands for joy.

"Hail, hail to the world's best knight!" they cried.

"How gallant and courtly he is!" said Queen Guinevere. "He is like his father, Sir Lancelot — a knight without reproach."

Sir Galahad seemed not to hear any of these words of praise. Very modestly did he walk back to the castle, with King Arthur at his right hand and Sir Lancelot at his left.

"I lack now only the shield," he said.

"You shall soon have a shield," said the King; "for I intend to hold a tournament in your honor, and you shall have the shield of the first knight whom you overthrow."

"Nay," answered Sir Galahad, "I would not have it so; for my own shield is waiting for me somewhere, and I shall find it at the right time."

The King made no reply, for at that moment he saw an unknown lady riding swiftly to meet him before the castle gate. She was dressed in white, and the horse upon which she sat was white as snow.

"O King," she said, saluting him, "I am the bearer of news from the mystic shrine of the Holy Grail. This very day shall great honor be shown

to you and your fellowship of the Round Table. For you shall have a vision as though of the precious cup itself passing unseen through the midst of your hall."

Then, turning to Sir Lancelot, she said, "Sir Knight, all men and women have hitherto spoken of you as the best and most gallant knight in the world; but now there is another who is far better and nobler."

"Yes, fair lady," said Lancelot very humbly, "you speak truly; for I know full well that I was never the best."

He lifted his eyes. The white lady and her steed had vanished.

That evening, as was their wont, the knights again assembled at the Round Table, and each seated himself in his allotted place. And all of them wondered and were glad when they saw the sweet-faced Galahad sitting modestly and unharmed in the Seat Perilous, where no one else had dared to venture. Suddenly there was a crash of thunder which shook the castle from roof to foundation; there was a flash of light far brighter than any sunbeam, and every part of the hall was lit with a splendor never seen before; and the air was filled with music sweeter by far than the music of a minstrel's harp or the song of the fairest singer. As

the knights sat entranced, they saw, floating in the air above the table, a white cloud with silvery linings like folds of softest silk ; and they knew that within it was concealed the image of the Holy Grail.

The next moment the vision disappeared ; but still the heroes sat in amazed silence, breathing sweet perfumes and feeling themselves refreshed and wonderfully uplifted. How long they sat, no one knew ; but at length the king arose and gave thanks to God for the great and strange honor which had been vouchsafed to them. Then the courage of the knights revived, and their tongues were loosened.

“ Did you see it ? ” each asked of his neighbor.

“ Nay, I saw the cloud,” was the answer ; “ but the image of the cup is like the cup itself — none save the pure in heart can ever see it.”

“ Where is that wonderful cup kept ? ” asked Sir Percival.

“ No man can tell,” answered Galahad ; “ but somewhere, in a well-hidden mountain castle, it reposes in its mystic shrine. There it is guarded and treasured by a king, true-hearted and good, to whom it has been sacredly intrusted.”

“ Truly,” said King Arthur, “ if the image of the holy cup can so fill us with raptures, how much more would the cup itself bless and refresh us if only we might be in its presence ! ”

With that, up sprang Sir Gawain, his face radiant with courage; and he vowed that for twelve months and a day he would seek for the shrine of the Holy Grail, if perchance he might be permitted to find it. Immediately all the others who sat at the table arose and with one voice vowed to follow that same quest through perils of fire and sword, of wind and wave, of land and sea.

But the King covered his face and wept. "Ah, such sorrow is mine," he said; "for now I shall be bereft of the noblest company of heroes the world has ever seen. Well do I know that never again shall I sit with you all at this Table Round; and it grieves me sorely to lose so many men whom I love most dearly, and who have done so much to help me."

Thus the King mourned, and all his knights mourned with him. Nevertheless, they had made their vows and must fulfill them.

So, in the morning, there was a great ado in Camelot. The knights put on their coats of mail and their helmets; they took their spears and their shields; they bade the King good-by. Then they got to horse and rode proudly down the street and out through the white gates. The King went up into his chamber and wept; the eyes of all the ladies of the court were wet with tears; and the

townspeople, both rich and poor, bewailed the departure of the heroes whom they loved so well.

Out through the gates rode the goodly company. Out rode Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth and Sir Bedivere, Sir Galahad and Sir Percival, and many another knight of courage and renown. For one whole day they kept together. They rode across the flowery meadows and over the wooded hills, and in the evening they came to the gray old castle where Sir Gurneman dwelt alone.

The hermit knight received them joyfully, and entertained them with right good will. "Would that I might also go on this quest," he said; "but a greater quest will soon be mine."

In the morning they took horse early, and each one chose the road that he would take.

"I shall ride to the south," said Sir Percival, "for I must visit my dear mother and tell her of the quest that I have undertaken."

"The sunrise path is the path to glory," said Sir Lancelot, and he turned his steed towards the east.

"I shall seek the Holy Grail in the mountain lands of the west," said Sir Gawain; "for it is among the hills that the purest gold is found."

"The steadfast northern star shall be my guide," said Sir Gareth; "and no perils on land or sea shall

cause me to swerve from the path that I have chosen."

"Be it east or west, north or south," said Sir Galahad, "I go where duty leads."

So, with words of hope and cheer, the heroes parted from one another, and each rode his own way to meet such adventures as might befall him.



STORY THE SEVENTEENTH

THE SHIELD OF THE RED CROSS

FOR four days Sir Galahad rode through the untrodden woods and the wild marsh lands; and each day, whether it was morning or noon or evening, he kept his face turned always toward the sun. Very noble he looked in his red armor, with his spear in his hand and his wondrous sword by his side; but he had not yet any shield. And those who saw him riding wondered no less at his beautiful armor than at his boyish face and joyous manner; and they whispered to one another, "Surely this is an angel from the skies."

At sunset of the fourth day he came to a fair abbey in the midst of the woods, and there he was welcomed right kindly.

"Come in, come in, and abide awhile with us," said the old abbot, meeting him at the gate.

"Welcome, welcome, thou knight without reproach!" cried a voice which Galahad knew. It was the voice of Sir Bagdemagus, a knight of the Round Table, from whom he had parted four days before.

Then there was much rejoicing and much talking, and Galahad asked Sir Bagdemagus what adventure had brought him to that lonely abbey, deep-hidden in the silent woods.

"I will tell you," answered Sir Bagdemagus: "Old stories tell that in such an abbey as this there is a shield, which only the best knight in the world can bear without great peril to himself. Now I have learned that that shield is really here, and to-morrow I mean to win it or perish."

"If you are the best knight in the world, you will succeed," said Galahad.

"Nay," answered Bagdemagus, "I know full well that I am not the best; and so there is the rub. But I pray you to tarry here and see what may befall me."

So Galahad rested there that night, and the abbot and the brothers of the abbey entertained him right joyfully, and gave him of the best that was in the house. The next morning at sunrise the two knights

were led into the chapel; and there, behind the altar, they saw the most wondrous shield their eyes had ever looked upon. It was well-shaped and large, and whiter than snow, save for a blood-red cross directly in the center of it.

"This shield," said the abbot, "awaits the coming of the best knight in the world. No unworthy man may touch it save at the peril of his life."

"I know that I am not the best knight in the world," said Sir Bagdemagus, "yet I will risk my life for such a shield as that."

Then he went boldly and took it down from its place and hung it about his neck.

"Beware! beware!" cried the good abbot.

But Sir Bagdemagus strode out of the chapel and mounted his steed, which was there in readiness, and rode away through the forest.

He was scarcely out of sight of the abbey when he met a strange knight clad in snow-white armor and riding a snow-white steed. Sir Bagdemagus had no time to defend himself. The white knight charged upon him with the swiftness of light. With his spear he pierced Sir Bagdemagus through the shoulder and hurled him from his horse. Then, standing beside him, he said:—

"Foolish fellow, why do you presume to take for your own a thing of which you are unworthy? Arise

now, and carry this shield back to young Sir Galahad. Greet him well for me, and tell him that he and he alone shall bear it."

Sir Bagdemagus arose, much bruised and bleeding. "I will obey," he said, "for I know that I was



greatly at fault. But if Sir Galahad should ask me your name, what answer shall I give?"

"My name is not for any one to know," answered the white knight.

"Then, I pray you, tell me this," said Bagdemagus: "Why may no one else bear this shield but Sir Galahad?"

"Because it belongs to him," said the knight; and with that he vanished like a white cloud melting in the summer sky.

Sir Bagdemagus with great pain remounted his steed and rode slowly and humbly back to the abbey.

"Here, Sir Galahad, knight without reproach!" he said, groaning. "Here is your shield. Take it — wear it — it belongs only to you."

Then in broken sentences he told all that had befallen him. The monks lifted him from his horse and carried him gently into the house. They laid him upon a bed and dressed his wounds and cared for him tenderly; but it was many a day before he was able to ride forth again in quest of adventures.

Sir Galahad took the wondrous shield and hung it about his neck. He bade good-by to the abbot and the wondering monks. Then he mounted his steed and rode away through the silent forest.



STORY THE EIGHTEENTH

THE ADVENTURES OF PERCIVAL



OW all this while Sir Percival was riding southward over the marshlands and the desolate moors. He knew that somewhere in this direction lay the great forest in which was his mother's humble hut; but he did not know the roads that led thither. Still he went forward with a song on his lips and joy in his heart, for he felt that every step brought him nearer to the one he loved so dearly.

"How proud my mother will be when she sees me in my armor and knows that I am really a knight," he kept saying to himself.

At length the marshlands were passed, and green hills appeared rising up before him; but still the country was strangely unlike any he had ever seen

before. The hills seemed to grow higher and higher as he approached them, and the way became rougher and more difficult. Suddenly he came to a little lake on the edge of a wood, where the shadows of great oaks fell darkly upon the water. A fisherman was sitting in a boat near the shore, and Percival stopped and called to him.

"Friend Fisherman," he said, "can you tell me the way to the forest of the Seven Dragons? My dear mother dwells there, and I long to see her."

The fisherman stood up in his boat. He was richly dressed like some lord or nobleman, but his face was very pale and sad.

"Sir Knight," he said, "the forest of which you speak must be very far from this place, for I have never before heard of it. You have ridden a great distance to-day. I know it by your weary looks."

"Indeed, I have ridden since the rising of the sun," answered Percival; "and now I would fain find some place of shelter for the night."

"Follow the path which you are now in," said the fisherman, "and by and by you will come to a castle with square towers and a huge bell above the gate. There you will find a pleasant welcome, and food and shelter for yourself and your steed."

Sir Percival thanked him and rode onward. But the path was very narrow, and in many places over-

grown with grass and shrubs. It led him through many a dense thicket and many a narrow pass in the hills. Often he lost his way and wandered into dark and dangerous places. The sun went down. Twilight faded. He was about to give himself up for lost, when he saw the twinkling of many lights on the hillside before him.

He rode straight onward. Up, up, up, the pathway led him; and by and by the dim outline of a castle rose before him. Then he saw the two square towers of which the fisherman had told him, and from every narrow window a lantern light was gleaming.

Sir Percival hailed the porter at the gate; but before he could give his name and explain his errand, two knights in silvery armor came out to met him.

"Welcome, most honored guest!" they cried; and they led him into the broad courtyard, where a thousand voices repeated, "Welcome, welcome!"

Sir Percival was amazed at the warmth of his welcome. It was more like that accorded to a long-absent brother than that usually given to a stranger and traveler. He knew not what to say as they helped him from his steed and led him to a private chamber which seemed as though expressly prepared for him. They removed his armor. They gave him water with which to bathe himself.

Then, to his great astonishment, they arrayed him in princely garments of which any king would have been proud.

"Why — why is this?" he stammered.

"Let it be so, noble sir," was the answer; "for such is the will of Queen Repanse."

Then he was led into a splendid hall, lit by a thousand tapers in the vaulted ceiling. His eyes were dazzled by the beauty and the brilliancy of the scene; for not even in the dream city of King Arthur had he ever beheld anything so grand and yet so lovely. Around the hall on cushioned seats sat four hundred knights, all beautifully attired. They sat at small tables, each table being laid for four, and sparkling with dishes of crystal and gold.

As Sir Percival entered the hall, the knights arose and bowed in token of welcome; and each face was lighted with a smile of joy. Then they seated themselves silently, their eyes still resting upon Sir Percival with a look of patient expectancy.

Seated in a great armchair at one end of the hall was the lord of the castle. He seemed to be ill and in pain. He was wrapped in furs, and his pale face was full of lines of suffering. Sir Percival thought that he looked much like the fisherman he had seen on the lake.

"Welcome, my son!" he said in a feeble voice.



ARTHUR
B. CHES.
1895

(209) A GREAT AWE FILLED THE HEART OF SIR PERCIVAL

"We have waited for you long. Sit down beside me and receive my blessing."

Sir Percival sat down; but he was so amazed that he could not speak.

A door beside him opened. Ten blue-eyed maidens arrayed in spotless white came in, two by two. The first couple carried a purple cushion of most beautiful workmanship; the second bore an ebony stand richly inlaid with gold; the rest carried in their hands flowers of every hue, whose fragrance soon filled the hall. Then, immediately, there was a burst of sweetest music, the most entrancing that mortal ears had ever listened to. And as its tones grew louder and more bewitching, the knights with one accord rose to their feet. For now the queen -- Queen Repanse -- came in.

A great awe filled the heart of Sir Percival, for he saw that the queen held in her hands a shapely vessel concealed in folds of richest silk, white as snow. He heard the knights whisper to one another, "The Holy Grail"; and he saw streaming from the vessel a radiance so blinding that no eye could rest upon it; but the cup itself, no one could see.

The knights again seated themselves at their tables; and from the wondrous vessel streamed all kinds of choice foods and rich wines, red and white,

and whatsoever could cheer the hearts of men ; and the tables were loaded with rare delicacies such as kings would relish. Then the queen and her maidens withdrew, and the knights began to partake of the feast.

Sir Percival looked around him. What meant all that silence? What meant all those looks of disappointment in the faces of the knights?

By and by the feast was ended. The lord of the castle arose and was helped from the hall. One by one the knights retired, speaking never a word. The tapers burned low ; the hall was growing dark.

At length servants came and led Sir Percival to his chamber. On the way they opened the door of a room, and motioned to Sir Percival to look inside. There he saw the lord of the castle asleep on a couch. His aged but handsome face was scarred with lines of pain ; and his hands twitched as he slept, and his lips quivered as though he would speak.

Sir Percival wished to ask about him, but he dared not ; and the servants silently drew him away and shut the door.

All that night Sir Percival could not sleep. He lay upon his bed, but the strangeness of this strange place oppressed him, and no slumber came to his weary eyes. At early dawn he arose and dressed

himself. His armor was by his bedside, as were also his sword and shield. He arrayed himself as best he could, and went down to the courtyard.

His horse, saddled and bridled, was waiting at the gate. His spear was leaning against the wall. But no man nor sign of life could be seen about the castle.

As though in a dream, Sir Percival mounted his steed. Instantly the gate opened and the drawbridge fell. He rode out, and the bridge was raised behind him. Then, as he started down the steep roadway, a voice called to him from one of the towers.

"Accursed man, begone! You were chosen for a great work, and have not done it. Go, and return no more!"

Then the great bell above the gate rang out in thunder tones; and the sound was echoed and re-echoed among the hills and the trees; it was carried to the mountain tops, it rolled upward to the very sky and seemed to fill the world. And Sir Percival, awed and amazed, his heart filled with dire forebodings, rode onward into the great forest.

"What is this great sin that I have done?" he asked himself. But his mind could frame no answer.

So he rode onward, he knew not whither. He had no longer any desire to seek his mother, for he felt that she would be ashamed of him. Day after

day he wandered aimlessly hither and thither. The quest of the Holy Grail was no longer possible for him; for had he not been in its presence, and had he not feasted upon its bounties?

At length, when the year and a day were almost past, he bethought him to return to King Arthur's court. The King was much pleased to see him, and Sir Percival told him truthfully of all the strange things that had happened to him.

"I do not understand it," said Arthur. "I cannot think what the sin was that you committed."

He called Merlin, and asked him the meaning of the adventures in the mystic castle; but the magician could not explain it. "The castle," he said, "is no doubt the place where the shrine of the Holy Grail is hidden; but why Sir Percival was so strangely treated there, I cannot even guess."

While he was yet speaking, an old woman, wrinkled and gray, came riding into the courtyard. She was mounted on a small pony as old and as gray as herself, and in her hand she carried a whip with many lashes. Her hair streamed in tangled masses over her shoulders, and her eyes gleamed like burning coals beneath her shaggy brows.

"I know her," said Merlin. "She is the witch, Kundrie, the messenger of the Holy Grail."

"You are right," cried the woman, "and I come

to cry woe upon King Arthur and his Round Table if they allow this Percival to remain with them. He is unworthy of honor. He was chosen to perform a great deed, and neglected to do it. Woe unto him ! Woe unto him ! ”

The King and those who stood with him were so amazed that they knew not what to do or say ; but Sir Percival had already mounted his steed and was waiting, fully armed, at the gate.

“ Tell me what I have done to merit this curse,” said he, “ and I will ride to the ends of the earth to undo the wrong.”

“ What have you done ? ” cried the witch. “ Did you not see the suffering lord of the castle ? Did you not note his pain ? And yet you spoke no word of comfort, you lifted no finger to relieve him. You were chosen to save him, and you failed to do it. Hence you are accursed among men ” ; and with these words she vanished in a flash of light.

“ I will seek the shrine of the Holy Grail again,” said Sir Percival, “ and I will undo the mischief that I have so unwittingly done.”

He spurred his horse and galloped away. “ I shall never see his face again,” said King Arthur. And he wept bitter tears, and moaned until the great hall of the Round Table was filled with sounds of woe.



STORY THE NINETEENTH

THE END OF THE GREAT QUEST

THROUGH lands unknown and unnamed, Sir Percival pursued his quest, hoping that perchance he might again discover the place of the Holy Grail. Summer passed and autumn, and the ground was covered with snow. But still he rode onward, his heart set upon success.

One evening, when hail and sleet were falling fast, he came upon a hermit's hut by the roadside. He was stiff with cold and weak for want of food; and he dismounted and knocked at the door. The hermit opened it, and kindly welcomed the wandering knight.

"Come in," he said. "Here are food and warmth full plentiful for two; and I will take care of your horse also."

So Percival went in and sat before the hermit's fire; and the hermit brought food and drink, and he was refreshed. Then the two talked long and pleasantly together, and the storm and darkness outside of the hut were forgotten.

"That is a right fair sword that hangs on your wall," said Percival; "and the shield that is beside it is its worthy mate. They must have belonged to some knight who knew well how to use them."

"They belonged to me in my youth," said the hermit. "For I am the brother of King Amfortas, the unhappy keeper of the Holy Grail."

Sir Percival's heart beat fast at hearing these words, but he controlled his tongue.

"Tell me about King Amfortas," he said; "and why do you call him unhappy?"

"King Amfortas," answered the hermit, "is of the line of kings who have always had charge of the shrine of the Holy Grail. But years ago he was struck with a poisoned lance, which caused him the unspeakable pain which he still endures. It was then that I threw aside my armor and came to this solitary place, hoping that in some way I might relieve my brother. But alas! his agony becomes greater with each passing day; and all who live with him in his mountain home share his distress."

"And can nothing be done to save him?" asked Percival.

"There is but one remedy," answered the hermit. "A young knight there is who was chosen to apply that remedy; but when the time came, he failed to do it, and thereby earned curses instead of the great reward that was prepared for him."

"I am that young knight!" cried Percival. "I am he who thus unwittingly did a great wrong and prolonged the king's sufferings."

"Is your name Percival?" said the hermit. "Then you are the son of my dear sister Herzeleide. You are my nephew and the nephew of King Amfortas. You found the way to the Grail, but you missed the opportunity of your life."

"How was it?" asked Percival, still amazed and perplexed. "What was it that I failed to do?"

Then the hermit opened a great book, and on a page that was filled with mystic characters written in black and illumined in crimson and gold, he showed Percival this writing:—

"There shall come a young knight of the royal house, whose name is Percival. And if, before the passing of the Grail, he shall kindly inquire concerning the king's ailment, then shall Amfortas be immediately healed, and all the sick in his kingdom shall be restored to health."

Percival read and wondered.

"Never neglect to do a kindness," said the hermit, closing the book; "for you cannot know what the result of that kindness may be. And now, my dear nephew, you have learned a lesson. In the morning, ride forth again upon your quest."

When the morning came, Percival found his steed standing ready at the hermit's door. He took his spear and his shield and mounted.

"Farewell, my son and nephew," said the hermit.

"Will you not tell me which way to ride?" asked Percival.

"Ride the right way. Your conscience will direct you," answered the hermit.

So Percival rode out into the snow-covered woods, where there was never a path nor other sign to guide him. How far he rode or how long, I do not know; but at the crossing of a river he met twenty knights who refused to let him pass.

"Who are you, and whither are you going?" they demanded.

"I am Sir Percival of Arthur's court," he answered; "and I am seeking for the shrine of the Holy Grail."

Then all the knights shouted, "Slay him! Slay him!" And they rode fiercely at him and slew his horse, and would have killed him also had not help come at the right time. But just as he was making

a last stand with his sword, a shout was heard, and a strange horseman in white armor, with a snow-white shield before him, burst suddenly into view. He rode fiercely down upon the robbers, shouting the war cry of the Britons, "Alleluia! Alleluia!"

The knights were filled with fear, and with one accord they fled through the forest, leaving Sir Percival unharmed.

"Thanks! thanks to you, my friend; and may Heaven's blessing rest upon you," he cried. Then, to his great joy, he saw that the strange horseman was none other than Sir Galahad, the knight without reproach.

"Oh, Galahad!" he cried; and "Oh, Percival!" cried the other, and the two were soon locked in each other's arms.

"Now, my brother," said Sir Galahad, "you have lost your horse, and the way is rough. Take my steed and ride, for I am better able for the journey than you."

"Nay, but I will not have it so," answered Sir Percival. "My loss was my own, and I will bear it. Ride on, brother, and I will walk by your side."

So the two went forward with stout hearts and willing minds. The snow melted away and disappeared, the ground became green with grass, the

trees budded and blossomed, the woods were joyous with the songs of birds.

Then suddenly Percival said: "Surely, brother, I know this place. Here is the lake. Here is the road through the tangled thickets. And here is the steep path that leads to the shadowy castle on the heights above."

They climbed upward, and in the evening arrived at their journey's end. They were received like expected guests; and when they had bathed and been refreshed, they were given most beautiful garments in which to array themselves.

"Come, now," said the servants, "we will lead you to the king."

So they were taken directly to the great hall where the four hundred knights were already sitting. King Amfortas, wrapped in furs, as before, welcomed them with kindly words and bade them be seated at his side.

"You have long been expected," he said; and the lines of pain deepened in his face and he groaned with agony.

Then Percival was sore perplexed and whispered a prayer, "Lord, teach me what to do." And a voice, exceedingly low and sweet, answered, "Ask."

The young knight understood. He turned to the suffering king and said, "What ails you, great

King? and why are these halls filled with silence and grief?"

Suddenly Queen Repanse entered, carrying the Holy Grail. The room was lighted with a radiance greater than that of ten thousand candles, and on the wall above the king were seen, in letters of flame, these words:—

**"Amfortas is Cured.
Percival shall be King."**

A sweet perfume filled the air, and from above came a sound of sweet voices singing, "Peace on earth, good will to men." But whether the voices were those of angels or whether the singing was by young maidens in the balcony, I cannot tell.

Slowly the queen bore the wondrous vessel through the midst of the hall, but such was its brilliance that none dared look at it, save Sir Galahad alone. And he, gazing steadfastly upon it, beheld its glorious form and read upon its rim these words:—

"Blessed are the Pure in Heart."

The two heroes stood still, amazed, and entranced with joy and thankfulness. As the queen with the Grail passed out of the hall, a door opened beside them, and an old man, clad in long white robes, entered with a golden crown in his hand. Then

the music changed to wild and joyous notes in which were mingled the voices of many singers.

“Hail, hail to Percival,
Long have we waited his coming,”

they sang, while the faces of the four hundred were lighted with smiles of rejoicing.

“Sir Percival,” said the old man, “I, who am your great-grandfather Titurel, crown you king. Be ever just and true, and guard most zealously the wondrous treasure that has long been intrusted to the keeping of our house.”

Thereupon, Amfortas, who was well and free from pain, arose and placed his mantle upon Sir Percival’s shoulders.

“Gladly, my dear nephew,” he said, “do I resign my kingdom to you. Uphold the right at all times, punish wrongdoing, rule wisely.”

And one by one the knights came forward, and placing their hands in Percival’s, swore to be true to him as their king. Then the choir sang in tones still more joyous:—

“Hail to thee, Percival, our king!
Seemingly lost forever,
Now thou art blest forever,
Hail to thee, Percival, our king!”

So the quest was ended, and Percival had come to his own. For many years he ruled wisely and

well over his people in the little kingdom which his ancestors had founded centuries before. He married the lovely princess, Konduiramur, and many sons and daughters came to bless him and share with him the joys of his mountain home. But among all these children the loveliest and the bravest was Prince Lohengrin, whose story is sung to this day in all the countries of the world.

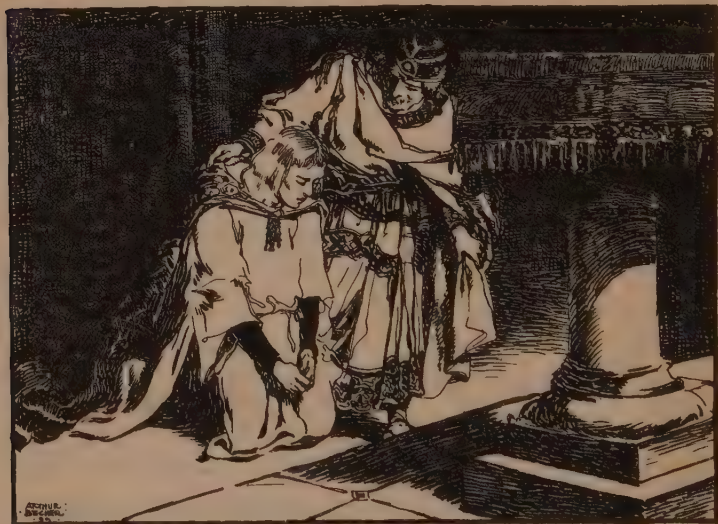
And now you ask, What became of Sir Galahad, the true-hearted and the pure, the best of King Arthur's knights?

There are many stories told of him, and some say one thing, some say another. Old minstrels sang of him as a prisoner in pagan lands, and then as king of Sarras in far-away Babylon. But I like to think of him as King Percival's friend and counselor in the little kingdom hidden among the hills. And the rest of my story is not unlike that of the minstrels.

One morning when he and King Percival went into the chapel to pray, they saw there an aged man in white robes kneeling before the altar. They fell on their knees in awe and reverence; but the stranger lifted them up and said to Sir Galahad, "I am Joseph of Arimathea, who brought the Holy Grail to Britain and intrusted it to the keeping of

King Percival's ancestors. I am now come to show you the perfect vision of that sacred vessel."

Then, on the instant, the wondrous Grail appeared to them without any veil or covering, and the light that issued from it was so dazzling that



they fell in a swoon to the ground. When, at length, Percival came to himself and knew where he was, he arose and looked around. The aged man had disappeared, and with him had gone the Holy Grail, never to be seen again on this earth. And Sir Galahad was kneeling before the altar as if in prayer.

“My brother and friend,” whispered Percival, and he laid his hand upon Sir Galahad’s shoulder. The hero moved not, nor made any answer. The loveliest, the gentlest, the best of all knights was dead.

The quest of the Holy Grail was ended.



STORY THE TWENTIETH

THE HIDEOUS LADY

VERY lonely was King Arthur in his pleasant halls and in his fairy city of Camelot; for the knights whom he loved the best were far away, seeking for the Holy Grail. Seldom now did the streets echo with the sound of brave men on horseback hastening to and fro on knightly errands. The Table Round was deserted. The merry laughter, the happy voices, the joyful songs that had once filled the halls with gladness and content, were heard no more. Even the wise magician, Merlin, seldom visited the castle; it seemed as though his love for King Arthur had grown cold and dead.

One day a damsel whom no one knew appeared suddenly in the judgment hall and claimed a boon of the King.

“Say what thou wouldst have,” said Arthur.

“Oh, King,” she answered, “I am in sore distress. For a base robber has seized my castle, which was my father’s, and has driven me out into the world, penniless and alone. Send some brave knight, I pray you, to be my champion and to avenge me of this lawless man.”

The King was much moved, for the lady was young and very beautiful, and her sorrow touched his heart.

“My brave knights,” he said, “are all far away — I know not where. I have here scarcely fighting men enough to defend the walls of Camelot. But you shall be protected and avenged; I, myself, will ride out and punish this robber as he deserves.”

Forthwith he called for his steed; he buckled the sword Excalibur by his side; he took his strong spear in his hand and rode out through the gates and over the hills, whither the lady led him.

By and by he saw, hemmed in by trees and tangled underwoods, a vine-covered castle which had neither moat nor walls. At the small gate stood the robber, fully armed and brandishing his spear.

“Defend thyself, base churl!” cried the King, dashing upon him with speed.

But the knight laughed and stood his ground; and well he might, for he was a magician, and had

laid a spell upon the castle and everything that was around it. King Arthur stopped suddenly, and all his courage fled; his arm trembled; his spear dropped from his nerveless hand; he felt that he was helpless.

"Ha, my brave King!" cried the knight. "I have you now. You are my prisoner, and it will be long before you return to your fairy city and your famous Round Table."

The King had never been in such straits. He felt that his only hope lay in making some sort of terms with his churlish foe.

"What ransom shall I pay for my freedom?" he asked.

The knight laughed loud and long. "Who talks of ransom?" he said. "What, indeed, shall be the price of a king?"

"I do not speak for myself," answered Arthur; "but I speak for my friends and for those whom I love. Give me leave, I pray you, to return to Camelot and bid them farewell; then I will come back and yield myself to you again."

"I will do even better than that," said the knight. "I will give you your freedom for a whole year. At the end of that time you must come again and bring a true answer to this puzzle: 'What is it that women most desire?' If you fail to do this, you

must surrender to me yourself and your lands and all that you possess. Do you agree?"

"Your terms seem easy," said Arthur. "I fancy that even the dullest man can answer so simple a question. Yes, I agree. If I fail to give the true answer, you shall have my kingdom."

"Swear it," said the knight.

"I swear it," said King Arthur.

"Then you are free."

But when the king rode home, he found that the puzzle was indeed a hard one to answer.

"What is it that women most desire?" He asked all the ladies of his court. Some said power; some, riches; some, pleasure; some, love. Some said it was a beautiful face. Some said it was a gallant knight. But which of these answers could be taken as the true one?

The King was much perplexed. He mounted his horse and rode out, asking every one that he met, "What is it that women most desire?"

He rode east, he rode west, but no good answer could any one give him. At length, as he was passing through the forest one day, he saw a woman standing beneath a tree. She was so hideously ugly that he could not bear to look at her. He turned his face away and was riding past her when she called aloud to him.

"Sir King," she said, "you need not be so proud as not to speak to me. I am not pretty, but still I might help you solve that curious puzzle which is troubling you so much."

The King stopped his horse, but he did not turn his face. "Most surely you are not handsome," he said; "but if you will tell me the answer to that question, you shall have any reward you may ask."

"Swear it," said the woman.

"I swear it," said the king.

Then she whispered the secret and said: "The reward which I demand is this. You must find some fair and courtly knight who will consent to be my husband."

"That is impossible!" cried the King, as he glanced swiftly at her grim face.

"You have sworn it! You have sworn it!" she screamed in reply.

The King gave spurs to his horse and rode away. He rode straight to the castle of the magician.

"What was that puzzle which you gave me, and which I promised to answer truly?" he asked.

The knight repeated it: "What is it that women most desire?"

"Is it beauty?" said Arthur.

"No."

"Is it wealth?"

"No."

"Is it jewels and fine clothes?"

"No."

"Is it the love of a gallant knight?"

"No! Now yield you, Sir King," cried the magician knight. "You have made your answers, and they are all wrong. Surrender to me your lands and your kingdom, as you promised."

"Hold, I have another answer," said the King. "The chief desire of all women is this: *To have their own way!*"

"Who told you?" cried the knight.

"The ugliest woman under the sun," answered Arthur. "I met her to-day in the forest, and she whispered it to me."

"Ah, that woman is my sister," said the magician. "She has betrayed me;" and with that he vanished in a cloud of smoke.

The King rode homeward, but he was as much perplexed as before. For which one among all his gallant knights would ever consent to marry a woman with so loathly a face? And how could he ever redeem the promise to which he had sworn?

He rode on, slowly and thoughtfully, to Camelot.

At the city gate a tall knight, fair of face and comely of form, was waiting to greet him.

"Hail, hail, dear King!" cried the knight.

"Welcome, welcome, dear Gawain!" returned the King; and the next moment the two heroes were locked in each other's arms.

"The twelve months and a day have passed," said Sir Gawain, "and my quest is ended. I have had adventures in great plenty, but I have never been nearer to the Holy Grail than I am at this moment."

"Right glad I am to see you, Sir Gawain," said Arthur, fervently, "and may God soon send the rest of my gallant heroes homeward." Then, as they rode up the sloping street to the castle, he told Gawain of his adventure with the magician and his grim sister.

"And is that what makes you look so sad?" asked Gawain. "Cheer up, Sir King; for I myself will marry the loathly lady. I will do this for love of you."

"Nay, nay!" said Arthur, "that cannot be. Every knight in Britain will laugh at you."

"Then let them laugh," said Sir Gawain; "if I can honor my king by marrying an ugly woman, shall I not do so? I have sworn to serve you, and that I will do."

So the next day the King rode into the forest; and when he had found the hideous woman, he told her of Sir Gawain's offer.

"Oh, I am glad of that," she said; and her teeth and lips looked so horrible that King Arthur turned away in disgust. Then she added, "I know Sir Gawain. He is the handsomest knight in your



court, and next to Sir Lancelot he is the most gallant."

"Do not rejoice too quickly," said the King; "for when he sees you he will certainly change his mind."

"I have no fear of that," said the woman. "Sir Gawain is an honorable knight."

"Then come with me," said the King; "but be

sure to keep well behind me, so that I shall catch no glimpse of your face."

Thus they went back to Camelot, the King riding slowly on his steed, and the hideous woman walking behind.

When Sir Gawain saw his bride, he was indeed astonished, for she was far uglier than he had supposed. "Yet," said he, "for the King's sake, and because I am a knight, I will be true to my word."

So that very afternoon, in the hall of the Round Table, the marriage was solemnized. But there was no merry feast, and no glad greetings cheered the bride and bridegroom. The ladies of the court could not bear to look at the loathly bride; and the knights who saw her jeered at Sir Gawain and made all manner of sport because of his strange choice.

As soon as the ceremony was over, he stole quietly away and hid himself where no one could see his humiliation. But the bride soon learned where he was, and followed him. He was vexed at heart, and yet he spoke to her kindly; for he was a true knight and courteous to every lady.

"My husband," said she, "why do you sigh so heavily and seem so sad? Why do you turn your face away and refuse to look at me?"

"Lady," said he, right gently, "I will tell you the truth. There are three reasons why I cannot look at you, and for these same reasons I am sad. First, you are old enough to be my grandmother; second, you are not handsome; and third, you are of low degree."

"Ah, Sir Knight," answered she, not at all offended, "those reasons are not so good as you suppose. For does not age bring wisdom? Are not those persons handsomest who behave most handsomely? And is not nobility of mind better than nobility of birth?"

She spoke so sweetly that Sir Gawain forgot himself and looked around. Oh! wonder of wonders! There he saw, not an old hag, but the most beautiful young lady that his eyes had ever looked upon! He sat speechless, entranced.

"Sir Gawain," she said, "you see me now in my true form. My brother, who is a great magician, changed me a year ago into the shape of a hideous old witch, too loathly to look upon. 'You shall stay thus,' he said, 'until two very unlikely things occur. The first of these is that some handsome knight shall take you for his wife; and the second,'—well, you shall learn about that."

Sir Gawain smiled, for now his joy was so great that he could hardly find words to speak.

"Will you always be as lovely as you are at this moment?" he asked.

"Ah, no," said his bride; "for only half the task is done and only half the charm is removed. I may wear my true form, which you now see, twelve hours every day; but for the remaining twelve I must be the hideous old witch whom no one can bear to see."

Sir Gawain sighed. "How shall we remove the other half of the charm?" he asked.

"I will tell you later on," said his lovely bride. "But now, since I must be ugly half of the time, which part of the twenty-four hours shall it be? Will you have me fair by day and hideous by night, or hideous by day and fair by night?"

Sir Gawain hesitated. Then he said, "I would rather have you look beautiful by night, for then I alone will see you."

"That will of course give you pleasure," said she; "but only think how much pleasure it would give me to wear my best looks in the daytime, when I meet the knights and ladies in the great halls and at the banquet table!"

"You are right, my lovely wife," cried Sir Gawain. "Be beautiful by day and be happy. I yield my will to yours."

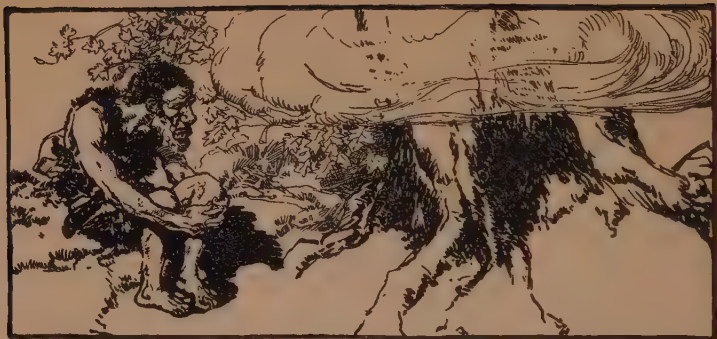
The fair lady clapped her hands and danced for joy.

"My husband," she cried, "you have removed the second half of the charm."

"But you have not told me what it was," said Gawain.

"It was only this, that he who married me should yield his will to mine. And now I shall be myself all the time and never change by day or night."

And that is the way in which Sir Gawain, the impulsive, the free-hearted, the brave, won for himself the most beautiful of all the fair ladies at King Arthur's court.



STORY THE TWENTY-FIRST

THE BEGUILING OF MERLIN

TWELVE months and a day had passed, and the knights who had ridden forth in quest of the Holy Grail began to return; but not all of them came. Of the hundred and fifty who had stood up with Sir Gawain and vowed to make the adventure, scarcely threescore ever again beheld the dream towers and the lofty battlements of Camelot.

Sir Lancelot, the courteous and the brave, came riding from the east.

“The Holy Grail,” said he, “is not for men like me to behold. Once I was near it—it was almost within my grasp; but my eyes were blinded, my strength failed me, and the blessed prize was lost to me forever.”

Sir Modred, with lowering brows and sneering air, came home on foot and with a broken lance.

"The Holy Grail, about which you have made so great ado, is a myth," he said. "There is no such thing on earth; and we were fools to be deluded by the idle tale which the coming of Galahad set in motion."

And others came — some joyously and with singing, but most with downcast looks and weary limbs.

"We heard of it often and in many places," they said; "and we endured all sorts of privations and faced many perils, hoping that we might achieve it. But always when we thought that we were near it, suddenly it was removed far, far away. It is like the will-o'-the-wisp in the marshy meadows, which so often leads unwary men to their destruction."

"The quest has ended as I feared," said King Arthur. "I have lost many of my noblest knights. Sir Kay and Sir Griflet are gone, and Sir Percival is no more, and Sir Galahad, the best of all, is lost to me forever. More than half the seats at my Round Table are vacant. I shall never see happiness again."

Soon there was another cause for grief. Merlin, the enchanter, had disappeared, and the glory of the dream city which he had built was fading away. Even the seats around the Round Table were

becoming tarnished, and many of the names upon them had disappeared. The great hall was darkened with shadows; and the joy and peace which had once gladdened every heart now gave place to suspicion and fear.

"Where is Merlin?" inquired every one. "If he were here, he would restore the glory of former days."

"Yes, where is Merlin, my wise counselor, my more than father?" said King Arthur.

"We will go in search of him; we will find him; we will bring him back," said Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth.

And so a new quest was begun — the quest of the wise Merlin; but only a few of the knights were moved to undertake it.

In this quest Sir Gawain was the leader. He rode southward over the hills and the marshlands, and everywhere he asked, "Have you seen aught of an aged man, wrinkled and gray, with eyes like coals of fire, and a voice more persuasive than the song of birds?"

Many answered him, "Yes, we saw such a man, and he was traveling with the noonday sun before him." And some said, "He passed this way, and with him was a beautiful lady who seemed to float in the air by his side."

So Sir Gawain rode onward until he came to the sea; and there he took ship and crossed over into France. Then he rode onward, repeating his question, "Have you seen aught of such and such a man?" And the people in that foreign land answered, "Yes, we saw him going towards the forest, and with him there walked a lady fairer by far than any that live on this side of the sea."

Sir Gawain thanked them and went on, until at length he came to the wild forest of Broceliande. He found there neither path nor dwelling, nor any human being to tell him the way; but everywhere there were giant trees and thick underwoods shutting out the light of the sun. As he paused, wondering at the wildness of the place, he heard a strange noise which seemed to come out of the earth at his feet.

He listened. He could plainly hear the sound of many blacksmiths hammering iron; he could hear the ringing of their anvils; he could hear a clanging and a clattering as though all the dwarfs who toil unseen in hidden caverns were busy at their tasks not far beneath him. He dismounted and put his ear to the ground. The sounds were much louder and plainer. He could even hear the voice of the master dwarf, crying, "Work busily, my brave men, and cease not till the master comes; for such is his command."

Sir Gawain wondered whether he might not find the entrance to the busy cavern from which so many noises issued. He went onward through the wood, leading his horse, and looking to this side and to that.

Presently he saw a maiden standing under an oak, her mouth wide open and her eyes asquint. She was not at all handsome, and Sir Gawain had a mind to pass by as though not observing her. But she, in harsh, brazen tones accosted him.

"Am I not pretty?" she asked.

"Nay, thou art not," said the truthful knight.

"Then give me your beauty," she said; and at once Sir Gawain felt himself transformed into a little, ugly, squinting dwarf. The next moment the damsel leaped upon his horse and sped away through the woods. But ere she disappeared, Sir Gawain thought he saw a great change come over her. She seemed to lose her homely looks and awkward figure, and to become sylph-like in form and beautiful as a dream.

"It is the Lady of the Lake," he said to himself

Then he went on through the woods, no longer a tall and graceful knight, but a misshapen dwarf too ugly to be seen of men. All that day and the next he wandered among the trees, eating nuts and berries, and bewailing his strange misfortune. At



(243) SIR GAWAIN FOUND HIMSELF TRANSFORMED INTO A DWARF.

night he made himself a bed of leaves, and slept thereon like a senseless beast of the forest.

The next day, when he arose, he saw that he was at the entrance to a natural bower where the trees arched overhead, and their branches meeting, formed a great dome of mingled green and gray. In the midst of this pleasant place stood a mighty oak, hollow at the core, and scarred with many a lightning stroke.

As Gawain stood looking and admiring, he heard a voice calling him by name:—

“Sir Gawain, I am right glad you have come.”

He looked towards the spot from which the voice seemed to issue. He saw no one; but now he observed that a thin white cloud encircled the great oak on every side. He went forward, intending to look into the hollow of the tree; but he could not pass through the cloud; it was like a transparent wall, solid and strong.

“Sir Gawain, you may not enter,” now said the voice; “but I am right glad you have come.”

It was the voice of Merlin the enchanter, and Gawain knew it.

“Oh, Merlin, Merlin,” he cried, “where are you and in what case do I find you?”

“I am imprisoned here within this wall which looks to you like thin, transparent cloud,” answered

Merlin; "and you may not see me nor come nearer to me."

Then Sir Gawain forgot his own mischance in bemoaning Merlin's sad and strange condition.

"Dear friend," he said, "tell me by what misadventure you came to be thus imprisoned in this lonely place."

"Ah, sir," said Merlin, "it was all because of my own folly. And yet I have long known that such would be the end of my earthly career. Before you were born, Sir Gawain, I read my fate in the stars."

"Tell me all about it," said Gawain.

"In the first place, then," said Merlin, "you must know that there is a beautiful and most bewitching fairy queen, called by some Vivian, and by others the Lady of the Lake."

"I have seen her," said Gawain.

"Well, I had long admired her beauty and her sprightliness; and she had long admired and coveted my wisdom. Many and many a day did we wander along the shore of her lake and through the dark green forest, talking foolishly and trying vainly to outdo each other in cunning.

"One day I thoughtlessly told her a story. I told her how in ancient times a great magician had built a prison cell, invisible to mortal eyes, and had

shut up therein a king's daughter, whom he also made invisible.

"When I had told her this story, Vivian mocked me. 'You claim to be the prince of enchanters,' she said, 'and yet you do not know how to build an invisible prison cell. You are not half so great as the magician you have told me about.'

"At first I bore her scoffs gently and kept silent. Then she began to weary me, and I said, 'I am that magician's heir, and I can do much more than build an invisible wall, for I have his book of enchantment which tells everything.'

"'I should like to see that book,' said Vivian.

"'You could never read it,' I said. 'For although it is a little book of but few pages, it is written in strange characters so delicate that not even a fairy's eye can make out their meaning.'

"'But you could teach me to read it,' she answered; and she never ceased to coax me to show her the book and teach her to read it. I refused; and still we were friends, and still we strolled by the margin of the lake and in the shady wood, and admired each other greatly.

"'If I had your wisdom,' she would say, 'I would rule the world.'

"And I would answer, 'How fortunate it is for

the world that women were made beautiful rather than wise !’

“ Now, you must know that here, under the wood of Broceliande, there are great caves deep in the earth. In these caves dwell my kinsmen, the dwarfs, the remnant of the ancient race that once peopled this land. There they live in peace, digging in the mines, working at their forges, and fashioning all sorts of wonderful things in gold and brass and iron.

“ It was my custom to visit these dwarfs twice every year; and whatever I bade them do, that they did willingly and joyfully, for they called me their master. It was my purpose to build a wall of brass around King Arthur’s wide domains, and for this purpose I set the dwarfs to work with spade and hammer and forge, and commanded them never to leave off until I came again.”

“ Yes, I heard them at work as I came through the forest,” said Gawain.

“ I know, I know,” answered Merlin; “ and there they will toil till the end of time, for I can never go to them to bid them cease. It was Vivian, the Lady of the Lake, who wrought this mischief. As I was about to make my accustomed visit to Broceliande, she said, ‘ Let me go with you.’ And as her company was pleasing to me, I consented.

“So we traveled across the marshland and over the hills, and she was ever by my side. At the sea-side we took a boat, and while I handled the oars she sat at the helm. And all the time, whether on land or on sea, her constant plea was the same, ‘Oh, Merlin, you are so wise! teach me your wisdom. Show me the book of enchantment, and let me read about that invisible wall.’

“At last, for sheer weariness of her entreaties, I took the little volume from my wallet and read aloud all that it contained — how to draw the magic circle, how to mutter the magic spell, how to weave the magic charm. She listened to me, and then bade me read it again and again until she had learned it by heart.

“‘Now, you must never make use of this enchantment,’ I said.

“‘Ah, no!’ she answered, ‘for being a woman, I might use it to some one’s harm.’

“So we came, together, through the wood of Broceliande to this very spot, and here I sat down to rest before going into the caves of the dwarfs.

“Then Vivian began again to talk about the enchantment which I had taught her.

“‘I wonder if a woman like me could build that invisible wall around an invisible prisoner,’ she said.

“‘You have promised not to try it,’ I said.

“‘But I should like to try it just in sport,’ she answered. ‘Will you not sit still in the hollow of that great oak, and let me see what I can do? It will be only in sport, you know; and then I can undo the charm and set you free!’

“Then I, like a brainless creature, consented. She drew the magic circle around me, she muttered the magic spell, she wove the magic charm just as I had taught her. And lo! I was an invisible prisoner, shut up within the great oak, and surrounded by an invisible wall.

“‘Now repeat it backward,’ I said, ‘and remove the charm.’

“But she laughed at me. ‘Ha! Merlin, I have thee now!’ she cried. ‘All thy wisdom is mine. Henceforth the world will talk of Vivian the enchantress; and poor old Merlin will be forgotten. Rest within thy magic cell, thou dotard. It shall be thy home till the end of time.’

“Then she waved her arms in the air. There was a flash of lightning, the thunder crashed among the trees — and I, Merlin, swooned away. When I awoke, the Lady of the Lake had disappeared, and I knew my doom.”

The voice paused, and deep groans of agony seemed issuing from the oak.

“Oh, master,” cried Sir Gawain, “I will free you

from your prison." He felt for his sword, and then first remembered that he was only a hideous little dwarf, without strength and without weapons of any sort.

"No man can ever set me free," said Merlin. "But go you back to Arthur's court and tell him what you have seen and heard. Bid him to be strong and valiant, for evil days are nigh at hand. Tell all the knights to be just and true, and urge them to love one another; for thus only may the fellowship of the Round Table endure."

"But how can I go back wearing this loathsome form?" asked Sir Gawain.

"I will free you from it," said Merlin.

He spoke three magic words from the heart of the oak, and at once Sir Gawain, like a butterfly issuing from its winter prison, leaped up joyfully in all his manly strength and grace. His sword was by his side, his shield was on his arm, his bright armor glittered in the rays of the sun.

"Oh, Master Merlin, I thank you!" he cried. "Must I now say farewell?"

But there was no answer save the echo of his own words — "Farewell, farewell."

Sir Gawain spoke again. He called the magician by all the endearing names he could think of; but from the heart of the oak came only smothered

groans, while sounds as of deep sighs and troubled whisperings were heard among the branches.

"Farewell, wisest of masters," the knight at last repeated.

Then with a heavy heart he turned away, and, sword in hand, hastened out of the forest.



STORY THE TWENTY-SECOND

THE CRIMSON SLEEVE



REAT was the sorrow at King Arthur's court when Sir Gawain returned and told of the strange fate that had befallen Merlin the enchanter. The King was overwhelmed with grief; he hid his face and wept.

"Alas!" he moaned, "I have lost my best friend. The prop and stay of my kingdom is fallen, and now I shall have sorrow upon sorrow so long as my life endures. For in all world there is not another man like Merlin. Oh, Merlin! Merlin! Merlin!"

Thus he mourned for seven weary days, and not even Queen Guinevere could comfort him. Then suddenly he sprang up and girded himself with his sword Excalibur. He strode into his judgment hall and called for his faithful knights.

“My noble heroes,” he said, “the time for dreaming has gone by and the time for doing is at hand. The high towers which Merlin builded with enchantments are even now beginning to crumble, and the glory of the Round Table is departing from our halls. Yet let us not despair; for our right arms are towers of strength, and the doing of valiant deeds will bring abiding glory to our kingdom.”

Loudly the knights applauded, and the old hall echoed with their shouting.

“Hail to Arthur, the rightful king of the Britons!” they cried. “We will follow him whithersoever he leads.”

Thus Arthur assembled around his standard all the heroes and the mightiest men of the land. Each of these had his own dependents and fighting men; and when all were brought together they formed an army which for number and prowess could not be surpassed. And the King with his knightly host went out fearlessly to fight and to overcome the enemies of Britain.

He defeated the Saxons in a great battle at Badon Hill, and forced them again to take ships and sail back to their own land.

He overcame the Picts, those painted men of the North, and caused them to hide themselves in the rugged recesses of their native hills.

He made himself master of all Wales and of Cornwall and of distant Lyonesse; and even the kings of Ireland and Scotland trembled when they heard of his many conquests.

Thus from sea to sea in Britain there was no king but Arthur; and he so dispersed and punished all robber chiefs and evil doers that neither in the forests nor in the open country was there any more lawlessness. There was no part of his kingdom in which a woman or a child might not travel alone from town to town and have no fear of being harmed.

At length, having no more foes to fight, the King went up to London Town, where he had been crowned; and there he established his court. For Camelot was no longer the beautiful city which it had been in the days of Merlin; and the glories of the Round Table had been forgotten in the triumphs of war.

But peace and quietness were not to the liking of knights who had been schooled in war. They loved action, they loved danger. They remembered their former achievements in the tourney and the battle-field, and they longed to ride forth again to seek new and untried adventures.

The King himself sighed for the days of old — those stirring times when it seemed that all the

world was being made anew. He grieved for the friends of his youth whom death had taken from him — for Sir Baudwin and Sir Ulfius and Sir Kay and many another gallant knight; and most of all he mourned for his foster father, Sir Ector, and his wise counselor, Merlin.

At length, as he saw the restlessness of his knights and felt his own sorrow growing daily more hopeless, he bethought him how he might do something to bring a little cheer into their lives. So he proclaimed that on Midsummer Day a great tournament would be held at Camelot; and he sent out messengers to invite all the heroes in the world to come and take part in the contests.

On a fair morning when the June roses were in bloom, a splendid company of knights and noblemen rode out from London on the way to Camelot. Foremost of them all was the King, clad in armor, and riding upon a giant steed resplendent in housings of purple and gold. Behind and around him were his knights, the flower of chivalry and the glory of Britain. Here were those whom the fortunes of war and of many a dangerous enterprise had spared. Here were Sir Bedivere, the faithful; and Sir Gawain, the impulsive; and Sir Gareth, the ever true; and Sir Lucan, the King's butler; and

Sir Bohors, the young nephew of Lancelot; and many another hero who had won fame in the service of the King. But the noblest and the best of all, Sir Lancelot, was not among them. He had remained behind in London.

Sir Lancelot had made his excuses to the King. "You know that I was wounded in the great battle with the Saxons," he said. "The hurt has never healed, and I suffer from it daily. I am not fit to contend in the tournament, and I pray that you will excuse me."

The King was much vexed that his most trusted knight should thus fail him; and as he rode onward toward Camelot he seemed deeply distressed and disappointed.

"Sir Lancelot loves me no longer," he muttered, "else he would not have failed to honor me at the great tournament."

And Sir Modred, who chanced to overhear him, whispered, "The beloved knight is staying behind to plot treason. Let the King beware of him."

Now, at that very moment, Sir Lancelot was walking in the King's garden and looking up at the balcony where Queen Guinevere was sitting. He was thinking how much happier he was there, seeing the roses and hearing the twittering birds, than he could possibly have been were he riding along



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QUEEN GUINEVERE SAW HIM FROM HER BALCONY.

the sunny road to Camelot. Yet he had contended in many a feat of arms and had won many a victory, and he half regretted that, in spite of his wound, he had not gone to the tournament with the King.

Queen Guinevere saw him from her balcony. "Has Sir Lancelot turned coward?" she cried, upbraiding him. "What sort of tournament will that be at Camelot when the King's best knight stays idly at home in London?"

Sir Lancelot stammered and tried to excuse himself, but the Queen would not listen.

"If you are as gallant as you seem to be, and if you have respect for the King, you will ride to Camelot and redeem your honor," she said.

"Madam," answered the knight, "you shall upbraid me no more. I will go to that tournament because you wish it; and I will adventure as I have never adventured before."

So the next day, at earliest dawn, he mounted his horse and rode out alone. He did not take the high-road, but followed a bypath which he knew would lead him, through unfrequented ways, to Camelot.

All day he rode, and neither man nor beast nor any dwelling did he see. At length the sun went down, twilight began to fade, the fireflies were flitting in the dark shadows of the woods. Then suddenly, at a turn of the path, he came out into an open

field. Through the dusky twilight he saw, just beyond the field, a little gray castle perched on the summit of a hill. At the foot of the hill a river flowed — the same river that bathed the white walls of King Arthur's palace in Camelot. Its banks were fringed with drooping willows and alders and blossoming vines.

Sir Lancelot rode forward and blew his horn.

"I am a stranger," he cried, "and I seek rest and shelter for the night."

The lord of the castle welcomed him most heartily; for not often did travelers visit this lonely place, and the sight of one so gentle of speech and so noble of mien gave him great joy.

"Thou art welcome to Astolat," he said; "and thou shalt have of the best that my poor home affords. Come in! Come in!"

So Sir Lancelot rode in and dismounted, and when he had disposed of his horse and his armor, he followed the lord of Astolat into his feast hall.

"We were already at supper when we heard your horn," said the old lord. "Come and join us, for we have great plenty, and there is room for another."

Two young knights and a young lady, white-cheeked and golden-haired, arose to welcome the stranger.

"These are my sons, Sir Lavaine and Sir Torre,"

said the lord; "and this is my daughter, Elaine, whom we call the Fair Maid of Astolat."

Then all sat down at the table, and as they ate of the bounteous meal, the host and his sons asked many questions of their guest.

"By your appearance and manners, I guess that perhaps you come from King Arthur's court," said the lord of Astolat.

"You guess well," answered Sir Lancelot. "I am one of the King's knights, and have been in his service a long time."

"And your name?" inquired Sir Lavaine.

"My name must not now be told," said Lancelot.

"Oh, pardon me," stammered the young knight; "I meant not to offend, nor do I wish to be too inquisitive. But we have heard that a great tournament is soon to be held at Camelot, and I thought perhaps you were riding thither."

"Truly, that is where I am going," said Sir Lancelot. "At least, I have some intention that way. But I am not pleased with my shield, and I hesitate to carry it."

"Not pleased with your shield!" cried his host. "Why, it is as fair a shield as ever I saw."

"It is fair enough," answered Sir Lancelot, "but for certain reasons I do not wish to carry it to the King's tournament."

"I will lend you my shield," cried young Sir Torre.

"Yes, you may have Sir Torre's shield, and right welcome," said his father. "He was made knight only a month ago, and is still lame from his first encounter. His shield is plain, however, for the only mark on it is the dent of a spear."

"The plainer the better," said Sir Lancelot. "I will borrow it of you, and think of you both evermore as my dearest friends. In the morning I shall ride to Camelot with Sir Torre's shield on my saddle bow. My own shield I will leave here until called for. And I thank you with all my heart."

"I should like to ask one favor of you," said the lord of Astolat.

"Tell me what it is," said Sir Lancelot.

"It is this: Let my young son, Sir Lavaine, go with you to the tournament. He will be proud to ride with so noble a knight, and he may be able to help you."

"Truly, I shall be glad of his fellowship," answered Sir Lancelot.

Then Sir Lavaine arose from his seat at the table and thanked him for his courtesy. "I could not ask a greater honor," he said, "and I promise you that, young as I am, I will try to acquit myself well."

Now all this time the lily maid, Elaine, sat at

the table and listened ; and whilst her eyes wandered ever to the face of the stranger knight, she thought that in all the world there could be no one more handsome, more courteous than he. But she modestly kept silent, and when the meal was finished, she stole thoughtfully away to her own chamber.

The next morning, very early, Sir Lancelot and Sir Lavaine clad themselves in their armor and made ready for their journey. Their horses were at the gate. The lord of Astolat and his household stood in the hall to bid the heroes godspeed. Then suddenly Elaine came in, carrying in her hand a crimson velvet sleeve embroidered with pearls.

“Fair knight,” said she to Sir Lancelot, “will you not wear this crimson sleeve at the King’s tournament? For I have never found a knight to wear a favor of mine, and I am sure that none could do it with more honor than yourself.”

Sir Lancelot answered her right courteously. “Fair maiden, I would be glad to serve you in any way, but it has never been my custom to wear a lady’s favor.”

“But if you wish to be unknown to your friends, as I guess you do, it will serve you well to change your custom,” said Elaine.

Sir Lancelot hesitated a moment, thinking upon her words. Then he said: “Fair maiden, I will do

for you what I have never done for another. I will wear your favor."

So with great joy the lily maid fastened the crimson sleeve in the knight's helmet.

"May it serve you well and bring you good fortune," she said.

"I thank you, fair Elaine," said Sir Lancelot, "and I leave with you my own shield. Keep it until after the tournament, and then I will come again and tell you my name."

Then he and Sir Lavaine mounted their steeds. The last farewells were spoken. Sir Lancelot kissed his hand to fair Elaine, and the two knights galloped away.



STORY THE TWENTY-THIRD

NEWS OF THE TOURNAMENT

ELAINE stood at the gate, and her eyes followed Sir Lancelot and her brother as they passed over the hill and into the green woods. She could see the sparkle of their armor among the trees as they rode onward in the morning sunshine. Then the leafy thickets of the forest hid them from her view.

She sighed and turned to enter the hall. "I wonder who the strange knight can be," she said to her father at the door.

"I know not," he answered; "but a courtlier gentleman I have never seen."

"He is a true knight," said young Sir Torre, "and he does me great honor by carrying my shield."

Elaine sighed again, but said nothing. She took

Sir Lancelot's shield and carried it with her to her tower. She placed it by her window where the light would fall upon it. She knelt down and looked at it, studying every dint of spear and every scar of sword and every mark and figure that was blazoned on it.



"It is a fair shield and well worthy of its owner," she said to herself. Then she set to work to polish it, breathing her sweet breath upon it and wiping it with her long hair until it was as bright as a mirror. "He will scarcely know it for its beauty," she said; and she blushed as she saw her own fair face reflected among the delicate lines.

Thus, every day thereafter, she kept the shield; and every day she watched and listened for some news of the strange knight and her brother Lavaine. She watched until Midsummer Day came and passed.

"We shall hear from the tournament soon," said the old lord of Astolat.

"We may expect Sir Lavaine and the strange knight to-morrow," said young Sir Torre. "I wonder how many scars my shield has upon it now."

But Elaine sat in her chamber in the tower and looked down at the winding roadway where it emerged from the forest. She watched until the sun sank among the trees and twilight began to darken. Then she turned to the shield and polished it again with her hair. "I wonder if they will come to-night," she sighed. But they did not come.

Another day passed, and another and another. "We shall hear from the tournament soon," still repeated the lord of Astolat. And still fair Elaine watched with straining eyes from her chamber window. But the road was deserted, the woods were silent, and no one came with news from Camelot.

A week went by, and even young Sir Torre began to feel uneasy. "I fear that my brother has fared ill at the tournament," he said.

"Have courage," answered his father. "We shall yet have good news."

A joyful cry was heard from Elaine in her watch tower. "They are coming!" she shouted. "I see the glitter of their armor among the trees. They are riding **this way.**"

Sir Torre and his father ran out to the gateway. They looked down the road towards Camelot. There, surely enough, they saw two knights emerging from the woods and coming rapidly towards the castle.

"They are strangers," said Sir Torre, much disappointed.

"At least we shall have news of the tournament," said his father.

But the white face of Elaine grew whiter still as the strange knights drew up at the gate and made themselves known. She listened at her window.

"I am Sir Gawain of King Arthur's court," she heard the elder and slenderer say.

"And I am Sir Gareth, the brother of Gawain," said the other.

"Welcome! Welcome to Astolat!" cried Sir Torre and his father. "Come in and bide the night with us."

That evening at the supper table the lord of Astolat said to his guests, "Fair sirs, since you come from King Arthur's court, I suppose that you were at the tournament on Midsummer's Day."

"Truly, we were," answered Sir Gawain, "and a more famous tournament was never held in Britain."

"Pray, tell us all about it," said the old lord.

"Well," said Sir Gawain, "you must know that the prize which King Arthur offered to give to the victor in the contest was a diamond of great size and beauty which had once decked the crown of a queen. To win this prize, all the heroes in the world were entered in the lists at Camelot. Even the kings of Scotland and Ireland were there, seated on high thrones by the side of King Arthur. And the fighting was most glorious."

"Was there a knight with a crimson sleeve among the combatants?" quickly asked Elaine.

"In truth there was," answered Gawain. "His shield had no device upon it; and so, from the lady's favor which he bore on his helmet, he was known only as the Knight of the Crimson Sleeve."

"And how did he acquit himself?" asked the maiden.

"Acquit himself!" cried Gawain. "Why, he was the hero of heroes. He and an unknown knight, who carried a white shield, came late into the field. But they charged right down upon us knights of the Round Table, and we had more than we could do to stand up against them. The Knight of the

Crimson Sleeve overcame everything before him. With a single spear he unhorsed four knights, and his companion overthrew Sir Bedivere and Sir Lucan. You never saw such fighting. How we all wished that our Sir Lancelot were there to try his skill with the stranger!"

"And who won the prize?" asked Elaine.

"*He* won it — the Knight of the Crimson Sleeve won it," answered Gawain. "But he was hurt in the side by a spear from Sir Bohors, and rode away full gallop before the award was given. No one knows whither he went."

At these words the fair Elaine cried aloud with mingled joy and pain; and she would have fallen to the floor had not Sir Gareth hastened to support her. But in a little while she came to herself so far as to say, "Sir Knight, I thank you for your good news, although it was tempered with bad"; and with that the rich red color rushed to her cheeks.

"Fair maiden," said Gawain, "you seem to know this Knight of the Crimson Sleeve."

"I do not know his name," answered Elaine, "but it was my sleeve that he had on his helmet. I knew that he was a noble knight when I gave it to him to wear as my favor; and he left his own shield in my keeping."

"Pray, tell us about him," said Sir Gareth.

But Elaine only smiled and, excusing herself, hastily left the table. Then Sir Torre, in few words, but proudly, told how the strange knight had come to the castle and had exchanged shields with him before riding on to Camelot.

He had scarcely finished his tale when Elaine returned, carrying the shield which she had kept with such loving care.

"It is Sir Lancelot's!" cried Gareth.

"Alas!" said Sir Gawain, "it was Sir Lancelot who left you this shield; and it was he who rode from the field wounded unto death, and waited not to receive the rich prize he had won! No doubt he is now dead, and we shall never see his like again."

But Elaine was more hopeful.

"Did he ride away alone?" she asked.

"The unknown knight of the white shield was with him," answered Gawain.

"Then perhaps we shall find him still alive," said the maiden. "The white knight was my brother, Sir Lavaine, and no doubt they are tarrying in some secluded place until the hero's wound is healed."

"I wish that it may be so," said Sir Gawain. "To-morrow I must carry the news to King Arthur; for it was on purpose to learn who this Knight of the Crimson Sleeve might be that my brother and I were sent out from his court."



STORY THE TWENTY-FOURTH

THE LILY MAID OF ASTOLAT

VERY early the next morning Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth took leave of their host, the lord of Astolat, and rode back towards Arthur's court at Camelot.

"We shall tell the King what we have learned," they said, "and then we shall come again and seek for Sir Lancelot and Sir Lavaine."

Scarcely had they disappeared in the shadows of the woods, when Elaine and her brother Torre also rode out of the gate and turned down the same pathway towards Camelot. "We shall not return until we have found them, either living or dead," said Elaine, as she kissed her father good-by.

"May God prosper you and bring you safe back to Astolat," said the old lord.

So the two set out hopefully on their errand. Soon they left the beaten pathway and plunged boldly into the tangled forest. For many days they wandered in untrodden ways, stopping at the huts of woodsmen and shepherds and visiting secluded castles and the lonely haunts of hermits and of outlawed men. But nowhere could they learn any news of the two lost knights.

"We shall never find them," said Sir Torre. "Let us return to Astolat."

"Nay, but let us seek for them one more day," said fair Elaine.

That very evening, as they were riding through a green valley, they came upon Sir Lavaine exercising his horse in front of a hermit's hut.

"Oh, brother," cried the maiden, "tell me if the knight who wore my crimson sleeve is yet alive."

"He is alive and in the hut with the good hermit," said Lavaine, joyfully greeting her. "He was the victor in the tournament, but so sorely wounded that I feared he would die. He told me of this hermit whom he had known in bygone days as a true and worthy knight. I helped him upon his steed, and we hurried hither.

"He was suffering great pain, and right here he swooned away. I thought him dead. But when the hermit uncovered his face, all pale and be-

smeared with blood, the breath came to him slowly and he revived. 'Ah, it is my old friend, Sir Lancelot of the Lake!' cried the good hermit; and he carried him into the hut and laid him on his own cot. He dressed the hero's wounds, and bade me be of good cheer, for he would surely live. And every day since then, the hermit has tended him with a brother's care; but he still lies on the cot and is too weak to rise."

Then Lavaine led his brother and sister into the hut. Elaine's heart was filled with grief when she saw the wan face and weakened form of the knight to whom she had given her crimson sleeve. But Sir Lancelot remembered her and welcomed her with a smile; and to Sir Torre he gave his hand.

"He is getting stronger every day," said the hermit; "but if he had a gentler nurse he would improve much faster."

So the Fair Maid tarried at the hermitage, doing all that she could to help the wounded hero. And after many weeks he was able to sit up and to walk among the trees beside the hut.

Then, one glad summer morning, Sir Lavaine brought his horse to the door, saddled and bridled; and Sir Lancelot, clad again in armor, mounted and found that he could ride with ease. So they all bade the hermit good-by, and the Fair Maid and Sir

Lancelot and Sir Lavaine rode away through the woods back to the castle of Astolat. There the old lord and Sir Torre, who had returned before, received them right gladly; and the old castle seemed brighter and more cheerful than it had ever been before.

Sir Lancelot tarried with his friends many days. Slowly his wounds became fully healed and he felt himself as strong as he had ever been. Then, one crisp, frosty morning, when the leaves were beginning to fall, he said, "To-morrow I must ride to King Arthur's court, for I have already been absent too long."

But the Fair Maid begged him to stay. "There is no other place so homelike and peaceful as our sweet Astolat," she said. "Stay, and we will be kind to you."

"Your kindness I do not doubt," said Sir Lancelot; "but my friends and kinsmen have long sorrowed for me, and I must go and see them."

"Then let me go with you, for I cannot bear to lose you," said Elaine.

"Dear child," answered Lancelot very gently, "that cannot be. But I will always be ready to serve you as becomes a true and faithful knight; and when you grow older, and wed some young hero of your choice, I will give him broad lands and great riches."

Elaine made no answer. But on the morrow, after she had bidden him farewell, she went up to her room and wept. She wept until the sun marked the noontide hour. She wept until the evening shadows fell dark across her chamber floor. Then with tear-wet cheeks and swollen eyes, she went down to join her father and her brothers at the supper table.

"What ails my lily maid?" fondly asked the lord of Astolat.

"Sir Lancelot has left us, and we shall never see his like again," answered Elaine.

"Truly, he was right gallant and courteous, as knights should always be," said the old lord. "We shall miss him; but then here are Sir Lavaine and Sir Torre, as good company as any one can wish. There is no reason why we should be sad, my daughter."

Elaine said not another word; but from that day she pined and faded away. Her father and brothers tried to cheer her; but the sadness grew upon her, and nothing could make her forget her sorrow. Ten days she suffered silently, sitting in her room and gazing down the forest road. Then, one morning, she called her father and her brothers.

"Dear ones," she said, "the time has come when I must leave you."

They saw her white cheeks, they heard her feeble voice, and they wept sorely. But she comforted them with loving words.

"Father," she said, "I wish you would grant me a favor."

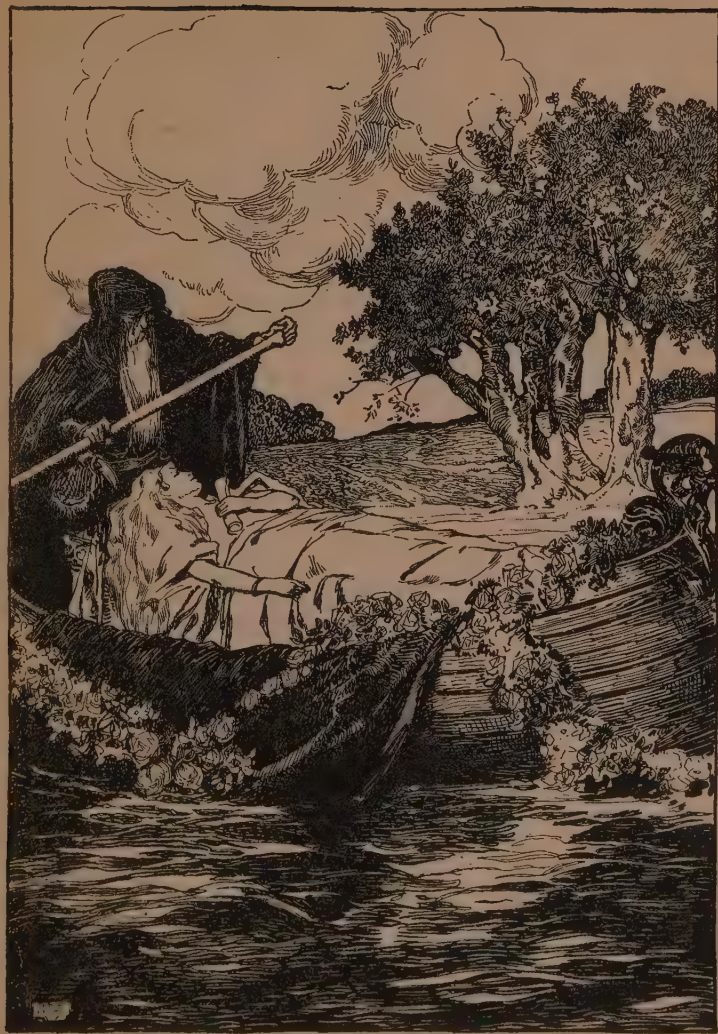
"You shall have anything you wish," said the old lord tenderly; for he still hoped that she would outlive her trouble.

Then she asked for paper and pen; and when they were brought, she desired her brother Torre to write a letter, word for word, as she should tell him. When this was done, she turned to her father and said:—

"Dear father, promise me that when I am dead you will place this letter in my hand. Have my body arrayed in fair white raiment, and lay it on a bier. Then let the bier be put in your boat which lies moored in the river, and let our old dumb serving man steer it down the river past the walls of Camelot. Perhaps Sir Lancelot will see the boat and come and look on me with kindness."

"I will do everything you wish," her father gently said; "yet, dear child, you must not think of death."

But on the morrow death came, and there was great grief in Astolat. The old lord placed the letter in the maid's white hand and closed the hand



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SLOWLY IT FLOATED DOWN TOWARDS CAMELOT.

upon it. "I will do everything as I promised," he said.

When the next sun arose, they laid her upon the bier and carried her down to the water side. They put her in the boat, which was all draped with black and festooned with autumn leaves and flowers.

There she lay, fairer than any lily, while her brothers kissed her cold brow and whispered, "Farewell, sweet sister, farewell forever." And the lord of Astolat, broken-hearted, moaned, "Farewell, dear daughter, till we meet again."

Then the old dumb serving man took his place at the helm, and the boat, with its fair burden, floated out into the stream. Slowly it floated down towards Camelot, guided by the dumb helmsman, himself as silent as the dead. Fair and very lovely appeared Elaine, arrayed in snow-white garments, with her bright hair streaming down, and the letter clasped in her lily hand. She lay as though asleep, smiling and peaceful, and those who looked could scarce believe that she was dead. And so, between the wooded banks, where the trees were gold and crimson and the birds had hushed their singing, the boat glided silently towards Camelot.

Now it chanced that Queen Guinevere had gone down to Camelot where all the court was gathered ;

and on an evening she was looking out of her window upon the silvery river that flowed past the palace walls. Of a sudden she saw a dark object floating down with the stream, and she called to the King in surprise.

“What is that which looks so like a black boat with a white lily resting in the center of it?”

The King came and looked.

“It is indeed a black boat,” he said; “and that which looks like a white lily is the body of some one arrayed in white.”

“See!” said the Queen, “it is drifting straight towards the shore and the landing place at the foot of the garden. Let us go down and see what it means.”

So they quickly went down to the water side, and many knights and ladies followed them.

Soon the black-draped vessel drew near, and they saw the old dumb serving man standing in the prow and the Lily Maid of Astolat lying on the bier with the letter clasped in her hand.

Very slowly and silently the boat glided onward with the stream. It swerved towards the shore, its keel grated upon the sandy bottom, and it stopped at the landing place where the King and Queen were standing.

Then was there wonder and great sorrow among

all that beheld the doleful sight. The King drew forth the letter gently from the maiden's hand, and when he had broken the seal, he gave it to his clerk to read aloud. The letter ran in this way:—

“Most noble Knight, Sir Lancelot of the Lake: I whom men sometimes call the Fair Maid of Astolat, am come hither to crave burial at thy hands. For my true love for thee has been my death; and as thou art a peerless knight, pray for my soul. And to our Lady Guinevere and all the ladies of King Arthur's court, I make moan: Pray for my soul.”

Thus read the clerk. And as he read, both knights and ladies wept, looking upon the white face of her who had indited the pitiful words; and as they gazed, they half fancied that the maiden's lips moved, as though whispering the message gently to them, “Pray for my soul.”

Then the King sent hastily for Sir Lancelot to come down to the water side. And when he had come and had read the letter and had seen the dead maiden, his heart was filled with sorrow.

“Oh, King,” he said, “I shall grieve my life long for this dear child. For she was good and true, gentle and loving, and faithfully did she care for me in my long illness. Yet I could not give her the love that she desired.”

“But I know you will grant her last request, Sir

Lancelot," said the King; "for you are kind and courteous to every one, and this is the only way in which you can ever requite her love."

"Truly it is my wish to do this service for the dear child," said Sir Lancelot.

So, on the morrow, in the presence of the King and the Queen and the fellowship of the Round Table, the Maid of Astolat was buried. And all the lords and ladies wept and made pitiful dole for the fair child whose life had so soon been ended. And over her grave they placed a white stone, smooth and without speck or flaw; and on the stone Sir Lancelot caused the likeness of his shield to be engraven.

"Since she guarded my shield so faithfully in life," he said, "I grant that it may be hers to keep it even in death."



STORY THE TWENTY-FIFTH

THE CRY OF "TRAITOR!"

NOW, ever since the return from the quest of the Holy Grail, and ever since the passing of Merlin, there had been but little peace at King Arthur's court. The Round Table was neglected. Many of the knights had forgotten their vows, and their names had faded from the seats which they had once occupied. Selfishness and greed had taken the place of love and good fellowship. The dream city of Camelot, once so beautiful, was falling into ruins.

After the great tournament, some of the best knights rode away into foreign lands, seeking new adventures. Only Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth, Sir Bedivere, and a few others most trusted by the King, remained at the court. But there were

many less noble who idled away their time in the city and ate from the King's bounty. These were overbearing and quarrelsome; they were jealous of Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain; and they even whispered slanders against King Arthur and Queen Guinevere.

The leader of these idlers and mischief-makers was Sir Modred, the dark-browed brother of Sir Gawain. He had never done a knightly deed, and had long ago lost his seat at the Round Table. He was cowardly and treacherous, and his evil nature was shown in his lowering face and unsteady gaze. He hated the King, he hated Sir Lancelot, he hated all men who were more noble than himself. His mind was always planning some wicked deed, and as the years passed by, he drew to himself all the worst and most evil-minded men in the kingdom.

"Who is this Sir Lancelot," he asked, "that he should stand first at the King's court? Who is he that he should be the Queen's favorite?"

At last his jealousy grew so strong that he spoke openly against both Sir Lancelot and the Queen, and accused them of treason against the King.

"You had better mind your own affairs and hold your tongue," said his brother Gawain, bluntly.

"I will mind my own affairs, but hold my tongue

I will not," answered Sir Modred. "I will accuse them before the King."

So, with his younger brother whose name was Sir Agravaire, he sought King Arthur and told him a vile story which he had made up concerning the Queen and his favorite knight.

"They are plotting to drive you from your kingdom," said Modred.

"They are plotting to slay you, so that Lancelot may become king," said Agravaire.

"Never will I believe such slanders," cried the King. "Begone from my sight! and you are lucky if I do not punish you for your evil speaking."

Sir Modred rode away in anger. "You do not believe us now," he said, "but we will prove that we have spoken the truth."

Not long after this, the King went to Carlisle to hunt deer in the great forest near by; and many of his knights went with him; but Sir Lancelot made an excuse to remain at home.

"He stays to plot treason," said Sir Modred. "Let us keep an eye on him."

So he got together twelve false knights who were his followers, and they hid themselves in the King's castle and watched Sir Lancelot.

At noon the Queen with her ladies sat down to dinner in her own tower. The castle seemed very

quiet, for all the knights were either hunting with the King or had gone elsewhere on quests of their own. Outside of the Queen's pleasant tower scarcely a sound could be heard save that made by the servants as they hastened hither and thither performing their various duties.

"How very lonely it is when the King and his men are away!" sighed the Queen.

"If only a single knight were here to amuse us, the dinner would taste better," said one of the ladies.

"That is true," said another; "and time would fly more merrily."

Then some one spoke of Sir Lancelot, and said that he was not among the knights who had ridden into the forest with the King.

"He must be somewhere in the castle," said the Queen. "I will send for him to come and dine at my table."

So she called to a page and bade him find Sir Lancelot and invite him to come at once to her tower.

Sir Lancelot was in his own chamber, burnishing his shield and humming a sad song to himself. For his mind that day was filled with thoughts of the many dear friends he had lost; and he was grieving for his faultless son, Sir Galahad, whom he had not seen since that fateful morning when he rode out to

seek the Holy Grail. But when the Queen's message was delivered to him, his face brightened, and his song changed to one of gladness. He hung his shield upon the wall, he threw his light cloak over his shoulders, and without sword or armor hastened to obey the call of his royal mistress.

Sir Modred and Sir Agravaine, from their hiding place, saw him climb the tower stairs and enter the Queen's chamber. When the door was closed behind him, they called to their fellows and whispered: "Now we shall have the traitor. Strike, and spare not!"

They crept silently to the door and listened. They heard the greetings with which the ladies welcomed Sir Lancelot to their little company. They heard the knight's gentle, pleasant words in reply. They heard the voice of the Queen inviting him to sit by her side at the table. They heard the ripple of laughter as Sir Lancelot made some gallant reply, and the feast was resumed.

Suddenly Sir Agravaine beat loudly upon the door with his fist, and Sir Modred cried out:—

"Sir Lancelot! Traitor! Come out of the Queen's chamber. Come out and give yourself up, for your treason is discovered."

There was great confusion and alarm. Some of the ladies fainted, and the Queen herself turned pale

and trembled. As for Sir Lancelot, he was amazed and angered that there should be such a clamor at the Queen's door.

Sir Modred and his fellows cried out again: "Traitor Lancelot! Come out and meet your doom. You are a coward. We dare you to open the door."

"Ladies," said Sir Lancelot, "I would rather die than suffer men to be so rude in the hearing of the Queen. Ever since the day that King Arthur knighted me, I have striven to be upright and true, and now this shame is forced upon me. Pray for me, good Queen and ladies, if I go to meet my death."

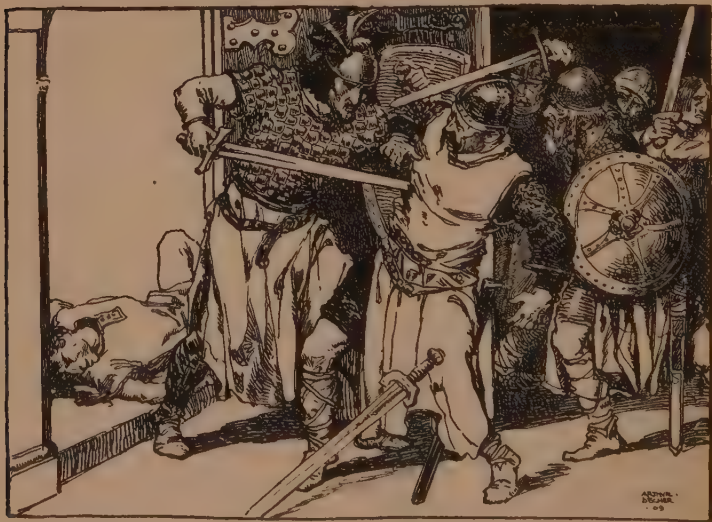
All unarmed as he was, he went to the door and called to those outside: "Men, cowards, whoever you may be! Cease your shameful noise. I will open the door, and I defy you to do your worst."

He unbolted the door. He opened it, but only by so much that one man might enter at a time. The foremost of the false knights pushed himself forward. He was a man of great strength whom his fellows called Sir Colgrevice. He crowded himself through the door and struck at Sir Lancelot with his sword.

But Sir Lancelot had wrapped his cloak around his arm, and with a deft movement he turned the weapon aside. The next moment, with his other

hand, he dealt Sir Colgrevice such a blow on the head that the ruffian fell senseless to the floor.

Quickly then did Sir Lancelot close the door and bolt it again. He stripped the false knight of his armor, and with the Queen's help arrayed himself in it. He took Sir Colgrevice's sword in his hand.



His eyes gleamed with rage as he put Sir Colgrevice's helmet upon his head.

"Traitor Lancelot! Traitress Queen!" cried the fellows outside, even more rudely than before. "There is no escape. Death to all traitors!"

Suddenly Sir Lancelot set the door wide open and rushed out upon them. At the first blow he

slew Sir Agravaine. The others fled before him in dismay. Right and left he struck, pursuing them. Soon eleven were stretched prone upon the ground, pierced by the sword of Colgrevice in the hands of Sir Lancelot. The only one that escaped was Sir Modred; and he, although he fled with all his might, was slashed and wounded in many places.

Having thus routed his foes, Sir Lancelot's fury left him. He went quietly to his own chamber. He threw Sir Colgrevice's sword upon the ground. He stripped himself of Sir Colgrevice's armor, and donned his own instead. Then he sought the Queen.

"Lady," he said, "this day's work will be the undoing of us all. I have made many foes; for the kinsmen of those whom I was forced to slay will feel bound to avenge them. They will seek my life, and there will be no safety for me in Britain. The cry of 'Traitor' will follow both you and me, and we shall not escape it so long as we live."

"As for me," answered the Queen, "I fear no harm. But I know your danger, and I beg you to ride away with speed ere the news of what you have done is carried to the King and his knights in the forest. For they who carry it will color it to suit their own purposes. Haste away, Sir Lancelot, and think not of me."

So Sir Lancelot mounted his horse, and with a few squires and serving men rode out of Carlisle. They rode not far, but only to the little castle of Joyous Garde, which was Sir Lancelot's own. And there they tarried, awaiting what might befall.



STORY THE TWENTY-SIXTH

THE BANISHMENT OF SIR LANCELOT

NOW when Sir Modred had escaped from the fury of Sir Lancelot, he made all haste to ride out into the forest where Arthur was hunting. Covered with dust and blood, he rushed into the presence of the King.

“Treason! treason! treason!” he cried.

The King was amazed. “Tell me what has happened,” he said.

“Did I not warn you that there were traitors even in your own household?” said Sir Modred.

Then he went on to say that Sir Lancelot had led an attack upon the knights who had tarried in the King’s castle, and that Sir Agravaine and eleven others, who were minded to defend the place, had been slain. “And I alone have escaped,” he cried.

"And the Queen, where was she?" asked Arthur.

"The Queen was in the doorway of her chamber, urging Sir Lancelot to the fray," answered Sir Modred.

"I will not believe it," said the King.

"Then ride home without delay, and see for yourself the twelve knights lying dead under your own roof," said Sir Modred.

Sore perplexed then was King Arthur. Dire forebodings filled his mind. And when one knight after another came and vowed vengeance upon Sir Lancelot for slaying a kinsman or a dear friend, he began to doubt and waver.

"Where is Sir Lancelot?" he asked.

"He has fled to his castle of the Joyous Garde, defying the King."

"And where is Queen Guinevere?"

"She has shut herself up in her tower, and will speak to no one."

As for Sir Modred, he left no stone unturned to carry out his evil designs. Many listened to his story and believed it, and many others took sides with him because they were kinsmen of the false knights who had been slain, and according to the custom of the time were bound to avenge them.

At length into the King's judgment hall at Carlisle there came perjured men who stood up and

accused the Queen. They declared that she was leagued with Sir Lancelot to dishonor the King and destroy his rule. And as each one told his well-planned falsehood, the King hid his face and wept.

"Is it not our law that traitors shall die the death by burning?" cried one of Modred's hirelings. "Does not this penalty apply alike to man and woman, knight and churl? And shall Guinevere, though called a queen, escape?"

"We call for judgment!" shouted another; and there were sullen murmurs throughout the hall, and rude voices cried, "Will not the King pass sentence as the law demands?"

Slowly King Arthur uncovered his face; and so great was his woe that he seemed now an old man borne down by grief and the weight of years. And as he spoke, his voice was like the cry of some lone sea bird, driven far from land in a winter's storm.

"The law shall be obeyed," he said. "For I sit here as King to be the rightful judge of all, whether high or low; and no love of mine shall shield even those dearest to me from the strict course of justice."

So then it was decreed that on the morrow, at the rising of the sun, the Queen should be burned to death outside the walls of Carlisle.

Forthwith the King sent men to summon Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth and Sir Bedivere and other

trusted knights who were still hunting in the forest, and knew naught of what had happened at the court. These, when they were found, rode with all speed homeward, and paused not till they drew rein at the castle gate.

"If we had been here," said Gawain, "this shameful thing would not have happened. Modred is forever plotting evil. No word of his can make me believe that the Queen is guilty of wrong."

"Judgment has been given and sentence is passed," said King Arthur, "and there is no help. I ask it of you, my stanchest friend, to be present to-morrow at the burning, and see that all things are done as has been decreed."

But Sir Gawain answered boldly: "Sir King, I will not be present at the death of my dear lady, the Queen. Evil men and false witnesses have persuaded you to consent to this dreadful deed, and I will have no part in it." And with that he departed, angry and sorrowing.

Then the King spoke to Sir Gareth and young Sir Gaheris, the brothers of Sir Gawain.

"Fair sirs," he said, "will you not, for the love which you bear your King, heed this request which I make of you? To-morrow, at the sun's rising, the Queen will be led to her death outside the city walls. Will you not attend her, and see that all things are

done orderly and well, according to law and the customs of the land ? ”

The two knights hesitated, and each looked at the other and then at the King. At length Sir Gareth answered : “ Sir King, we will obey you in this, as becomes our duty ; but it is sorely against our will. We will be present, as you desire, but for the honor of our knighthood we will not appear in arms when our dear Queen is led to her death.”

Then they sorrowfully mounted their horses and rode out of the King’s castle.

Early in the morning, as had been decreed, Queen Guinevere was led to a place outside the walls, and there she was bound to a tall stake driven in the ground. Many of her ladies, who had followed at a distance, stood by the gates and wept at the grievous sight ; and the best of King Arthur’s knights turned their backs upon the city, and with uncovered heads rode away into the forest, unwilling to remain where such a deed of cruelty was being done.

As for Gareth and his young brother Gaheris, they could not bear to look at the Queen in her dire distress. They had come to the place without arms, and they stood there silently, with their faces turned away and hidden in their cloaks. But all around them there was a rabble of rude churls and false knights who loved such cruel sights ; and these filled

the air with their hooting and shouting. And no one dared do aught in defense of the Queen, lest he also should be accused of treason.

Men and boys ran to fetch dry fagots to heap up around the victim. Fire was brought. Soon a cloud of smoke arose, and little tongues of flame began to curl upward from among the fagots. The noisy cries of the rabble were hushed, and few hearts were not melted with pity at sight of the lovely face of the Queen turned heavenward as though in prayer.

Suddenly there was a great tumult — men shouting, women screaming, and the sound of horses galloping wildly through the assembled crowd.

“Sir Lancelot! Sir Lancelot!” cried some. And then there was a swift vision of the knight and his squires riding furiously forward and with red swords cutting down all who were in their way.

Right towards the stake and the kindling flames rushed Sir Lancelot. He severed the cords which bound the Queen, he lifted her into the saddle before him. Then quickly he wheeled his steed and with his followers galloped away unhindered. Soon they were safe again in the stronghold of Joyous Garde.

Many were the knights who rejoiced when they learned that Sir Lancelot had so gallantly rescued

the Queen from death, and even those who had cried out against her were glad in their hearts that she had escaped.

But when the news was carried into the city, there was great dismay because of the blood that had been shed on that fateful morning.



"How fares it with my brothers, Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris?" asked Sir Gawain.

"Both were slain," answered the messenger.

"Oh, my brothers, my brothers!" cried Gawain.

"How came they to be slain?"

"They were standing by the roadside with their

faces covered," said the messenger, "and Sir Lancelot, in his furious onslaught, slew them both."

"That cannot be true," said Sir Gawain, "for my brothers loved Sir Lancelot, and there was nothing they would have refused him. Surely he would not harm them."

"But they are both slain, and by Sir Lancelot," answered the messenger.

Then Sir Gawain swooned and fell to the ground; and for a long time he lay speechless from sheer grief and horror. At length he arose and sought the King.

"Oh, King," he said, "is it true that my brothers are slain?"

"Alas! it is too true," answered Arthur. "Sir Lancelot rode upon them in the crowd and slew them, not knowing who they were, and not seeing that they were unarmed."

"Then here I make my vow," said Sir Gawain. "Never, so long as I live, will I leave Sir Lancelot in peace until I have punished him for this bloody deed and have fully avenged my brothers' death."

And from that day he would give the King no rest until he had summoned all who were faithful to him to make war upon Sir Lancelot.

As for Sir Lancelot, he abode for a while in his castle of the Joyous Garde. And when word was

brought to him of the death of Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, he loudly bewailed his evil fortune.

"Now I shall mourn all my life long," he cried. "For I loved Sir Gareth as my own son; and it was I myself who made him a knight. Surely these are evil days that have come to us in Britain; and I shall never again have joy."

Then he sent messengers to the King, desiring safe conduct for himself and his knights that he might bring Queen Guinevere back to Carlisle, where he would openly defend her cause. In this plea the Pope in Rome supported him, and commanded that Arthur should receive him and be reconciled with him.

So the King pledged his word; and on a day in autumn, Sir Lancelot rode out of the Joyous Garde and down into Carlisle. By his side rode Queen Guinevere; and behind were a hundred knights who had sworn to serve him whether in weal or woe. All these were arrayed, not in armor, but in fine attire of green velvet with rich embroidery and borderings of silver and gold. The horses, too, were adorned with gorgeous housings of crimson cloth sparkling with gems; and tiny bells dangled and jingled from their bridle reins.

Right boldly rode Lancelot through the streets of Carlisle, and right joyful were the people when

they saw their queen returning to her home. "She is not a traitor, after all," they cried; and they followed the company even to the gates of the castle.

"Then Sir Lancelot dismounted and led Queen Guinevere into the hall where Arthur was sitting with Sir Gawain and other noble knights about him. Both knelt before the King, and then Sir Lancelot, arising, took the Queen by her hand and lifted her up.

"My lord, King Arthur," he said, "I bring you here your queen. No truer nor nobler lady ever lived than she; and I, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, stand here ready to do battle with any one who dares dispute it."

With that, he turned and looked upon the lords and knights who were present; but none of them ventured to speak or accept his challenge. Even Sir Gawain was silent, for he had always held that Queen Guinevere was guiltless.

Then Sir Lancelot spoke again. "My lord, King Arthur, let me now speak in my own behalf. I stand here to declare my loyalty. Never in word or deed have I been false to you. And although I slew certain knights, it was because they forced me to do it in my own defense. They beset the door of the Queen's chamber, and with shameful outcry called me a traitor knight."

"And rightly did they call you so!" interrupted Sir Gawain.

"Nay, Sir Gawain," answered Lancelot. "If that had been so, I could not have encountered a dozen armed knights and come out unharmed."

Then King Arthur spoke.

"Sir Lancelot," he said, "there was a time when I loved and trusted you above all other knights in my kingdom. But now you do naught but ill by me and mine. You have treacherously slain many who were most dear to me, and among them Sir Gareth, the flower of my court."

"My lord, King Arthur," said Lancelot, "that deed was not done of my own intent. For Sir Gareth and his brother were in the road and I saw not their faces nor knew them. Never shall I cease to regret my hasty act, and I shall grieve for the two knights all my life. For I loved Sir Gareth as my own son."

"Liar and traitor!" cried Sir Gawain, hotly. "You slew him defenseless and unarmed, and for that unknighly act you shall give account."

"Sir Gawain," said Lancelot, "those are bitter words, and it is full plain that I shall never again have your love. But remember the friendship that has been between us these many years; and once you thanked me that I saved your life."

"All that is now past and shall avail nothing," answered Gawain. "Henceforth there shall be naught but enmity between us, and while life lasts I will not rest till I have avenged my brothers."

"Sir Knight," cried the King, "cease your brawling. If you must quarrel with him, do so at another time. For he has come here under surety of my word, and I will suffer no one to harm him."

"Be it so," answered Gawain, "but from this day there shall be naught but war between us."

Thereupon the King turned to Sir Lancelot and said, "Sir, we allow you fifteen days in which to leave this kingdom."

Sorrowfully did Sir Lancelot answer. "My lord, King Arthur, I shall obey you in this as I ever have done. The friendship which you gave me for so many years I may no longer claim. For no grief of mine can avail to win your forgiveness."

Then he went to the Queen and said: "Dear lady, I must now leave this fair land which I have loved so well. Pray for me, and if ever I can serve you, send for me."

Having thus spoken, he turned about, and without greeting to any one, strode from the hall. Through the streets of Carlisle he went as he had come, and all his faithful knights were with him. They rode straightway to the Joyous Garde, which

from that day was known as the Dolorous Garde, because of the great grief that had come to its master.

“My friends,” said Sir Lancelot, “we must now make ready to depart to my own lands which I hold in distant France.”

Then all cried loudly that they would go with him; and he thanked them and promised them fair estates and rich rewards; for he owned broad realms and many noble castles in France. But he sorrowed that he must thus part from King Arthur. “Wicked men have poisoned his mind,” he said; “and I fear that much trouble will come to him through Sir Modred, who is ever plotting evil. Yet, come what will, I will never lift my hand against my king.”

So, on the fifteenth day, he embarked and set sail for France; and all his kinsmen and the knights who had sworn to do him service went with him.

As for Queen Guinevere, she dared not tarry in Carlisle, where so many enemies were still plotting to do her harm. She fled to Almesbury, where was a fair abbey of nuns; and there she dwelt secure from the dreadful storm which soon brought ruin to King Arthur's realm.



STORY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

THE SAD WAR IN FRANCE

NOW Sir Gawain would give the King no rest, but urged him every day to make war upon Sir Lancelot. And the King, grown weak and irresolute, listened to him and made excuse.

“Sir Lancelot is now beyond the sea in his own country,” he said. “He will do us no harm while so far away.”

“I see that you have no love for those who remain faithful to you,” answered Sir Gawain. “You cared nothing for my brothers whom Lancelot slew without cause. You would willingly suffer all your knights to be slain if only this vile traitor might escape.”

So at last the King consented, and gathering a

great fleet, he passed over to France with the flower of his army. And he decreed that Sir Modred should rule Britain in his stead until his return.

When Sir Lancelot heard that the King with Sir Gawain had landed and was marching against him, he withdrew into his strong castle of Benwick, and all his knights and retainers were with him. "Never, unless I am forced to do it, will I lift my hand against the King," he said.

The King's army marched through the land, burning and destroying, and at last encamped around Sir Lancelot's stronghold; but the castle was so strong and its walls were so high that no force of arms could prevail against it. Then Sir Lancelot sent a message to the King, reminding him of their former friendship, and asking for peace on any terms. But the King, urged by Sir Gawain, answered, "There shall be no peace while the traitor Lancelot lives."

So now in Benwick Castle there were both grief and anger; and the knights who were gathered there loudly called upon Sir Lancelot to sally forth and give battle to the King.

"Alas, alas! that it should be so!" he cried. "But now no other course is possible to us."

Very sorrowfully, Sir Lancelot armed himself. He mounted and rode out at the head of his host.

"Now be brave in fight, and strong to repel our foes," he said. "But let no one do violence to the King. I will suffer no harm to come to him who was once my friend and who knighted me."

Fierce was the onslaught and bloody was the battle. On the one side, Sir Bohors, Sir Lavaine, and many another gallant knight did noble service for Sir Lancelot. On the other side, Sir Gawain charged furiously hither and thither, while the King, calm and fearless, directed the fight. Long and doubtful was the struggle, for seldom had warriors been brought together who were more equally matched.

At length Sir Bohors and King Arthur met in deadly onset. The King's spear was broken and he himself was unhorsed.

"Hold there, Sir Bohors!" cried Lancelot, riding hastily forward. He alighted and lifted the King from the ground. He placed him upon his own horse and gave him a spear which he had plucked from a fallen knight.

The King looked at him with sorrowing eyes. "Alas! alas! Sir Lancelot," he said, "that there should ever be war between us two."

"My Lord Arthur," cried Sir Lancelot, "I pray you put an end to this war."

At that moment, Sir Gawain came riding up with

cries of "Traitor! traitor!" He charged upon Sir Lancelot and had almost overthrown him before he could defend himself. Then began a knightly combat such as few have ever seen. The two armies drew back, each to its place, to watch the issue of the battle between Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain.



The two knights wheeled their horses and rode far apart. Then they rushed upon each other with the noise of thunder. They met, and each unhorsed the other. Quickly they arose and drew their swords. Sir Gawain fought fiercely, aiming at the

life of his foe; but Sir Lancelot sought only to defend himself, being loath for Sir Gareth's sake to do harm to Sir Gareth's brother.

The contest lasted long. Sir Lancelot had much ado to ward off the strokes that were aimed at him; for the more he forbore, the more furious did Sir Gawain become. At length, to end the fray, he smote so mightily upon Sir Gawain's helmet that he felled him to the earth. Then indeed might he have taken the life of his foe; but he drew back and refrained from striking.

"Coward! Traitor!" then cried Sir Gawain. "Why do you draw back? Slay me while you may, for while I live I shall never cease to be your foe."

"Never will I strike a fallen knight," answered Sir Lancelot; "and although you may be my foe, I shall not willingly be yours."

Then he called to the King and begged him to draw off his men that there be no more fighting, at least on that day. "Think of the love that was once between us, my lord, King Arthur," he said. "And may God keep you whether you be my friend or foe."

So Sir Lancelot with his knights and faithful men went back into the strong-walled castle; and King Arthur and his company betook themselves to their tents. As for Sir Gawain, his squires lifted him up

and carried him to the King's own pavilion, where he lay for three days, helpless and suffering from his grievous wound. On the fourth day he arose, strong and hopeful, and sat at breakfast with the King.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall be able to mount my steed, and soon my wound will be so nearly healed that I can bear the weight of my helmet."

While he was speaking there came to the camp three horsemen who demanded to see the King without delay. They were messengers, arrived in haste from Britain, and they brought letters and alarming news to Arthur.

"Hasten home, or all will be lost," said the letters; "for Modred has set himself up as king of the Britons. Many knights and noble lords, as well as robber chiefs and lawless men, have joined themselves to him, and he is marching out of London with a great army. He declares that he is the grandson of King Uther, and therefore the rightful heir to the kingdom."

Then, indeed, was there dismay and much hurrying to and fro in the camp of Arthur.

"Now we know who is the traitor," said the knights to one another.

"Ah, that my own brother should be so base!" said Sir Gawain.

Without delay the tents were folded, the signal

for marching was given, and soon the King and his warriors were again embarked upon the sea. But the sky was overcast, the waves ran high, and the little ships were tossed hither and thither like bubbles upon the water. Long and hazardous was the voyage, and when at last the seasick heroes hove in sight of Britain's shore, they saw there a new peril confronting them.

For all along the beach and on the white cliffs were hosts of desperate men drawn up under Modred's banner to prevent their landing. And there, on a gray morning in mid-autumn, a desperate battle was fought, half on sea and half on land.

Hurling stones and spears and other missiles into the approaching ships, the rebels sought to prevent the King and his men from disembarking. But they, pushing bravely landward, resisted their foes as they might.

The struggle was fierce and bloody; but at length Sir Modred's men were beaten off, and the King's fleet was safely moored by the shore. Then, while some were busy burying those who had been slain, others, with King Arthur, went from ship to ship caring for the wounded and binding up their hurts.

Presently they found Sir Gawain, lying in the bottom of a boat and wounded unto death. They

carried him tenderly to the shore and laid him in the King's tent.

"Alas! alas! there will never be any more joy in the world," said Arthur. "For no one could love another as I have loved Sir Gawain and Sir Lancelot; and now they are both lost to me."

"Oh, my King," moaned Sir Gawain, "this is indeed the end. I have been smitten on the wound which Sir Lancelot gave me; and rightfully have I been served. For I was unforgiving and unkind, and it was through my willfulness that this unhappy war was undertaken."

Then he begged them to raise him up; and resting himself in the arms of the King he dictated a letter to Sir Lancelot. The letter ran in this wise:—

"To Sir Lancelot, the noblest of all knights, I, Gawain, send greetings before I die. For I have been smitten on the wound which you gave me before your castle of Benwick, and I shall not recover. I bid all men witness that I brought this upon myself, and that you are innocent of my death. I beg that for old friendship's sake you will come again to Britain, and when you see my tomb, pray for Gawain of Orkney. Farewell!"

So Sir Gawain died there on the shore of the sea; and he was buried in the chapel of Dover, which was nigh at hand.



STORY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

BY THE SHORE OF THE WESTERN SEA



REAT was the rejoicing among all good people when it became known that King Arthur had returned to Britain with his host. Many knights and lords who had been won over to Modred through his wiles turned now again to the King, confessing their error. And he forgave them every one, and they joined themselves to him until he was soon at the head of a mighty army.

Nevertheless, Sir Modred with his rabble of lawless men defied him, still declaring that he was the grandson of Uther, and therefore the only rightful king. So, at a place call Barham Down, a great battle was fought which lasted from noon until the setting of the sun. Right stubbornly did Modred's men dispute the field, but they were no match in

valor to the trained knights under King Arthur's banner. Many fell on both sides, and in the darkness the rebel host stole silently away and fled towards the western hills.

Still Sir Modred was not disheartened. "Who but old Uther's grandson is the rightful overlord of Britain?" he said.

So, marching through the hill country and the mountain passes of Wales, he won to his cause many chiefs and daring men who knew Arthur only by name. But Arthur pursued him closely and gave him but little rest. Often there were skirmishes between the King's knights and the traitor's knights, and once there was a hard-fought battle in which the rebels were again beaten and forced to flee.

At length, Modred with his host came down to the shore of the western sea. Before him was the vast water, behind him were his foes, on either side were steep mountain walls rising to the sky. He could go no farther. Here he must make a determined stand, trusting to the valor of his men for victory. "To-morrow," he said, "I shall be the unquestioned overlord of Britain."

Meanwhile King Arthur's army had encamped for the night in a grassy meadow not far away. And the talk of all the knights and squires and fighting men was of the battle that would surely take

place on the morrow. The King, weary with hard marching, lay in his tent asleep. As he slept he dreamed that Sir Gawain, clad in bright armor, stood suddenly beside him.

"Hail, Arthur, king and truest of friends!" said the vision.

"Welcome, Sir Gawain, thou dearest and best of my knights save one!" answered the King. "What word of weal or woe bring you to me?"

"I bring you a warning," answered the vision. "Risk no battle with Sir Modred's host to-morrow. For if you engage in fight, the day will be lost and you, with the flower of your army, shall perish. Make a truce with Modred for one month; and in that time Sir Lancelot will come with his heroes from over the sea. He will help you to overthrow the traitor and restore the Round Table to its former glory."

"Ah, Gawain! Gawain!" cried the King, waking from his dream. He reached upward to touch the knight, but the vision had vanished in the darkness.

Forthwith Arthur called for his counselors and told them of his dream. They listened, and all agreed that it was a sign from heaven and that the warning should be obeyed. So, as soon as it was daybreak, they sent a messenger to Modred's camp, bearing this message to the traitor knight: —

“King Arthur desires to hold a conference with Sir Modred at the hour of noon to-day. He asks that the meeting may take place on the summit of the little hillock midway between the two armies and in plain sight of both. And he is willing that Sir Modred come with seven knights, provided that the King may take with him an equal number.”

Sir Modred was in no pleasant mood; but when he read the message he thought that now perhaps he might be able to gain more through cunning than he could hope to win by force of arms. So he smiled and returned this answer:—

“King Modred is willing to hold the conference with Sir Arthur as proposed. He will meet him to-day at noon, on the hillock midway between the two camps and in plain sight of both armies. He will be accompanied by fourteen knights, instead of seven, and he is willing that Sir Arthur should be escorted by an equal number.”

So, all that morning, the two armies rested where they had camped; and at noon the King and Sir Modred, each with fourteen knights, rode out towards the place agreed upon. Both armies were drawn up in battle array to witness the conference. Each feared treachery on the part of the other, and both were ready for immediate combat.

“If a single sword be drawn, charge at once upon

our foes," was the parting word of King Arthur. And Sir Modred's orders to his men were the same.

Now, as the two parties were about to meet on the summit of the hillock, a snake sprang out of the grass and fastened its fangs in the foot of one of Sir Modred's knights. The knight, taken by surprise, quickly drew his sword and with a sweeping flourish severed the reptile's head.

The waiting warriors on either side saw the gleam of the sword, although they knew not why it was drawn. Instantly the trumpets blared, the air resounded with battle cries, and the two hosts charged upon each other. Never was there another such battle; never was there such furious fighting. The very earth shook with the fierce conflict—horsemen charging horsemen, and armored warriors thrusting at each other in deadly encounter.

King Arthur rode hither and thither, seeking for Sir Modred; and that traitor knight, blinded by the dust of battle, dashed aimlessly about the field, slaying friend and foe alike. So, all that fateful afternoon, the battle raged. The sun sank in the sea, and the end was nigh.

"Where now are all my brave knights?" cried the King.

All were slain save Sir Bedivere and Sir Lucan, and both these were sorely wounded.

"But who is that knight who goes stumbling over the heaps of dead?"

"That is Sir Modred, the cause of all this ruin," feebly answered Sir Lucan.

"Modred! Traitor! Now I have thee!" cried the King, his great heart bursting with grief and rage.



Grasping his spear with both hands, he rushed upon the traitor. He smote with such force that the weapon passed clean through Sir Modred's body, cleaving his armor as though it were thin air.

“Go to thy doom, foul traitor!” cried Arthur; but as he spoke, the dying Modred raised his sword and struck. The heavy weapon smote King Arthur upon the head; it pierced through his helmet; it bit into his skull. With the stroke, Sir Modred fell back, stark and dead; and Arthur, swooning, dropped senseless to the ground.



STORY THE TWENTY-NINTH

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

SO there, among the heaps of slain, lay Arthur, senseless but still alive; and near him on the ground sat Sir Bedivere, stanching the wounds of his fellow-knight, Sir Lucan. But, so far as one might see, there was not another living man. Of all who had joined in that furious strife, the most had perished, and the rest had fled like hunted deer from the scene of carnage.

“The King is dead,” moaned Sir Lucan. “Now, let us also die.”

“Alas, that he should lie here in this unhallowed spot,” said Sir Bedivere. “I will carry him to the little chapel which stands yonder on the hillside and then I will return to you.”

“Nay, but I will help you,” said Sir Lucan; and

gathering all his strength, he arose and stood by the side of his comrade. "I will help you, and then die by his side."

So the two lifted King Arthur from the ground, and with much pain and growing weakness, bore him slowly from the field. It was long ere they reached the little chapel, although the distance was not great; and now the full moon had risen round and red above the silent earth.

"He breathes! he lives!" cried Sir Lucan, as they laid him tenderly down before the altar.

"Now let us cheer up," said Sir Bedivere. "The King is not dead."

King Arthur opened his eyes and saw the two knights kneeling in the moonlight by his side.

"Sir Lucan! Sir Bedivere!" he murmured.

But Sir Lucan did not hear him. For at that same moment the blood spouted forth in a red torrent from his wounded side, and the faithful knight fell lifeless by the side of his master.

The King looked at him. "Alas, alas, Sir Lucan!" he moaned. "Thou wert ever true to me, and now thou art dead for my sake. If I should live, no matter how long, I would never cease sorrowing for thee."

Then he turned to Sir Bedivere, who stood weeping beside him. "Leave off thy mourning for a

while," he said; "for the time is short and there is much to do. To-morrow thou mayst weep thy fill. But now take my sword Excalibur that I have borne with me these many years and cast it into the sea. Watch what thou seest, and then quickly bring me word."

"That will I do, my Lord King," answered Sir Bedivere.

He stooped and drew the sword from its scabbard—not the scabbard which the Lady of the Lake had given him, but another of richer workmanship. He stepped out into the moonlight, and went briskly down the hill slope towards the sea. And as he walked he looked with gloating eyes upon the wondrous blade Excalibur. For the hilt was studded with precious stones which glittered like stars in the still moonlight, and its keen edge glowed redly like a line of living fire. Then on one side of the blade Sir Bedivere read the inscription, "KEEP ME"; and turning it over, he read, "THROW ME AWAY."

He hesitated, trembling and uncertain what to do. "It were a pity to throw it away," he said; "for the world has never seen its like. The King is not in his right mind because of his grievous wound. To obey him would do no good; to disobey would do no harm."

So when he came down to the sea he hid Excali-

bur among the reeds by the shore and then hastened back to the little chapel.

"Hast thou done my bidding?" asked the King. "What didst thou see?"

Sir Bedivere answered, "I saw nothing but the water lapping the sandy shore; and I heard nothing but the wind moaning among the crags."

"Ah, that thou shouldst be false to me!" feebly muttered the King. "I charge thee go quickly back and do the thing I told thee; and then bring me word."

So Sir Bedivere hastened down to the shore a second time; and he was minded to obey his master. But when he drew the wondrous weapon from among the reeds and saw its jeweled haft and flashing edge, his heart failed him.

"Shame, indeed, would it be to throw away a thing so precious," he said. "The King knows not what he does. Why should I obey him?"

Then he hid the sword a second time and hurried back to the King.

"What didst thou see?" asked Arthur, breathing heavily.

"I saw naught but the peaceful waters sleeping in the moonlight," answered the knight.

Then spoke the King sternly and with more strength. "Sir Bedivere, thou art false to me, and

unkind. Twice hast thou disobeyed me. Go now again, and fail not to do my bidding; else with my last breath I will up and slay thee."

Then quickly did the knight return to the shore. He drew Excalibur again from among the reeds; but he dared not look upon it. He twirled it swiftly above his head, and then cast it from him. The mighty weapon, glowing like a meteor, shot through the air and fell far from the shore. But ere it reached the water, a white hand rose out of the sea and clasped it. Three times the hand rose and brandished the sword on high, and then withdrew and was seen no more.

Sir Bedivere hurried again to the King.

"Thou hast done it! I know it by the glad look in thy eyes," said Arthur. "And now carry me down to the shore. For I have tarried long and the night is cold. I pray thee hasten, for my time is nigh its end."

So the knight raised his master tenderly from the ground and carried him in his arms down to the lonely shore. There the moonlight still lay glistening on the silent sea, and no sound was heard save the rippling of tiny waves upon the beach. But as Sir Bedivere rested with his burden, a royal barge, all draped in black, came gliding towards the shore. In the barge sat three queens of Fairyland

with crowns upon their heads, and they too were clothed in black.

"Place me in the barge," said Arthur, feebly. And as it touched the shore, Sir Bedivere tenderly obeyed.

The queens reached forth their hands and lifted the King. They laid him softly on a couch, weeping meanwhile and calling him by his name. And one of them took his head in her lap and said, "Alas, my brother, thou hast been over long in coming, and I fear thy wound has taken cold."

Then the barge began to move slowly away from the shore,

"Alas, my lord, King Arthur!" cried Sir Bedivere, weeping. "Thou art gone from me and I am left alone; for all my comrades whom I loved are dead. Whither shall I go, and what shall I do?"

Very feebly the King made answer: "Do what thou seest best, Sir Bedivere; for in me there is neither counsel nor help. The words of wise Merlin, 'From the great deep he came, to the great deep he shall return,' are being fulfilled. The old order changes evermore, giving place to the new, but God's purposes are forever the same. And now, farewell. I go to the island valley of Avilion, there to heal me of my wound. If thou seest me not again, pray for me."



So the barge floated away in the still moonlight, and not a ripple was left behind it on the sleeping waters. Sir Bedivere watched it until it had vanished utterly. Then he turned about, and wandered sorrowing into the silent woods.

And of King Arthur nothing more is known. Some men say that he still lives in Fairyland, waiting till the time foretold by wise Merlin when he shall return to his own people and restore the glories of ancient days. But most men believe that he is truly dead, and that on his tomb in Camelot these words may be read:—

**“Here lies Arthur, once King
and King to be.”**

NOTES

Ag'ra vaine, Sir, sometimes called "The Haughty," was the son of King Lot and brother of Sir Modred and Sir Gawain. He joined Modred in the conspiracy against Sir Lancelot, and was slain as narrated.

Almes'bu ry (ämz'bër rī), a town in Wiltshire, not far from Salisbury, where there was an abbey of nuns. Here Queen Guinevere took refuge after fleeing from King Arthur's court, and here she died; but Sir Lancelot caused her body to be carried to Glastonbury and buried there. The ruins of the abbey and town of Almesbury may still be seen.

Am for'tas, King, the grandfather of Sir Percival. He was intrusted with the keeping of the Holy Grail, but upon the coming of Percival he resigned his kingdom to him. His story is related in the German legend of *Parsival*.

Ar'thur, King, the hero of many romances, and mythical overlord of Britain. Most of the legends agree that he was the son of King Uther and Ygerne. There is an old tradition, long believed in Wales, that he is not dead, but rests in the fairy island of Avalon (Avilion) "till he shall come again, full twice as fair, to rule over his people."

As'to lat, the castle and home of Sir Bernard, the father of Elaine. According to Sir Thomas Malory it was at the place now called Guildford, in Surrey.

A vil'ion, generally called the "isle of Avalon," or the "apple island," is described by Tennyson as a fairy region

"Where falls not hail or rain or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea."

In fairy mythology it is said to be the home of Morgan the Fay and of fairies generally, and there not only Arthur but many other famous heroes dwell in bliss awaiting the time appointed for their return to earth. In modern geography it is identified with Glastonbury, where tradition places the tombs of both King Arthur and Queen Guinevere.

Bab'y lon, in the confused geography of the middle ages, was a name employed to designate indefinitely almost any rich but unknown kingdom in the distant East.

Ba'don Hill, the place where King Arthur won his twelfth great victory over the Saxons. Identified by some as the modern city of Bath.

Bag de mā'gus, Sir, a knight of the Round Table, headstrong but brave.

Bar'ham Down, a hill near Canterbury. An English antiquary of high authority states that it is the site of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery which probably gave rise to the story that it was the scene of the great battle between King Arthur and the rebels under Modred.

Baud'win, Sir, one of the first of King Arthur's knights.

Beau'mains ("fair hands"), the nickname which Sir Kay gave to Gareth when he took service as a scullion in the King's kitchen.

Bed'i vere, Sir, the first knight to offer homage to Arthur after his crowning, and the last to remain with him.

Bel'licent, the widow of King Lot. She was the daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne, and according to some the half-sister of Arthur. Her sons were Modred, Gawain, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth. She is sometimes called Morgause or Margawse, and sometimes Elain.

Ben'wick, the kingdom of King Ban, the father of Sir Lancelot; also Sir Lancelot's strongest castle. It was somewhere "beyond the seas," probably in Brittany or northern France.

Bleys (bliz), a famous wizard, the master of Merlin.

Bohors, Sir (bors), otherwise called Sir Bors de Ganis, the nephew of Sir Lancelot.

Bras'tias, Sir, one of King Arthur's first and staunchest supporters. He was an elderly knight and had formerly been in the service of King Uther.

Bro ce li an'de, a forest in Brittany.

Caer le'on, a town on the Usk River, near the southern border of Wales. It was founded by the Romans and called by them Isca Silurum.

Car lisle', a city in northern England. But the Carlisle mentioned in the stories of King Arthur is probably the same as Caerleon.

Cam'eliard, the domain of King Leodegrance, probably in the eastern part of England.

Cam'elot, the fairy capital of King Arthur's realm. Some have supposed it to be Winchester, in the south of

England; but others assert that it was an important town and fortress near the river Camel, in Somersetshire, not very distant from Glastonbury.

Col'gre vance, Sir, a base knight, who was a fellow-conspirator with Modred.

Dag'o net, a squire and valet of King Arthur.

Ec'tor, Sir, "lord of many parts of England and Wales, and foster-father of King Arthur" — a knight of Lyonesse of much influence and power.

Elaine', the "lily maid of Astolat," daughter of Sir Bernard and sister of Sir Lavaine. Her story is told by Sir Thomas Malory and repeated by Tennyson in the *Idylls of the King*. See, also, Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*.

Ev'an et, a squire at King Arthur's court.

Excāl'ibur, the sword of King Arthur, presented to him by the Lady of the Lake. In some of the legends it is called "Mirandoise." The name Excalibur is also sometimes applied to the sword which Arthur drew from the anvil and the stone.

Flor'i mel, in these stories, the name of the wife of Sir Ector and foster-mother of King Arthur.

Gä'her is, Sir, a younger son of King Lot.

Gal'a had, Sir, the son of Sir Lancelot, and noblest of all the knights. Because he was pure of heart and blameless, he was the only one who could sit in the Seat Perilous and the only one who was permitted to see the Holy Grail.

Gar'eth, Sir, the "last and tallest" son of King Lot and Queen Bellicent. He served as scullion in King Arthur's kitchen, and was nicknamed "Beaumains." His story is related in many legends and also by Tennyson in the idyll entitled "Gareth and Lynette."

Ga'wain (gaw'wan), **Sir**, son of King Lot and Queen Bellicent. He was surnamed "The Courteous."

Gore, the unknown realm of King Uriens, as unreal perhaps as the fairy island of Avilion, whose queen, Morgan the Fay, was said to have been the wife of Uriens.

Gor'lo is, the lord of Tin tag'el Castle in Cornwall, and the husband of fair Ygerne. In some of the legends he is said to have been the father of Arthur. He was slain by Uther, who immediately married Ygerne and took possession of all of his estates.

Grif'let, Sir, a young knight of whom Merlin prophesied that he would be "one of the best in the world."

Guin'e vere, the Queen. The name is variously spelled, Guenever, Ginever, etc. In these stories Tennyson's spelling has been adopted.

Herz'e lei de, the mother of Percival. In some of the legends quite different names are given.

Joseph of Arimathea. He is said to have been a rich man in whose newly made tomb the body of Christ was laid. Tradition relates that he afterwards came to Britain, bringing with him the cup or dish commonly known as the Holy Grail.

Joyous Garde, the castle and estate which King Arthur presented to Sir Lancelot. "Some men say it was Anwick, and some men say it was Bamborow."—*Malory*.

Kay, Sir, son of Sir Ector. King Arthur made him the seneschal or steward of his kingdom. He was surnamed "The Rude and Boastful," and was one of the least worthy of the knights.

Kon dui'ra mur, in German legends, a princess who became the wife of King Percival.

Kun'drie, a wise woman, the messenger from the castle of the Holy Grail.

Lan'ce lot, Sir (also spelled Launcelot), the strongest, the bravest, the most courteous of the knights of the Round Table. He was the son of King Ban of Benwick (Brittany). When a baby he was stolen by Vivian, the Lady of the Lake, and brought to King Arthur; and for this reason he was often called Lancelot of the Lake. After the death of Arthur and of Queen Guinevere, Lancelot retired to a monastery, where he spent the rest of his life.

La vaine', Sir, the brother of Elaine. He is described as young, brave, and knightly.

Le'o de grance, King (or Leodogran), the father of Queen Guinevere.

"Leodogran, the king of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter and none other child."

—TENNYSON.

Lo'hen grin ("Knight of the Swan"), the son of King Percival. His story is the subject of one of the most popular operas of the present time.

Lot, King, of Orkney. He refused to recognize Arthur as the overlord of Britain, but was defeated in battle and slain. His wife was Bellicent (or Morgause), a daughter

of Gorloïs, and his sons became the foremost and most honored of the knights of the Round Table.

Ly'nette' (or Linet), the "Disdainful Maiden," was by some nicknamed "The Savage." Tennyson says that she became the wife of Sir Gareth, and this is repeated in these stories; but the ancient legends say that she married Sir Gaheris.

Ly'on esse, the extreme southwestern point of Britain, which now lies "forty fathoms under water." Here was the home of Sir Éctor, where Arthur spent his childhood, and here the last great battle was fought "by the shore of the Western Sea."

Ly'onors (or Lionēs), the lady of the Castle Perilous. According to Sir Thomas Malory, it was she who became the wife of Sir Gareth.

Lu'can, Sir, the butler of King Arthur.

Mer'lin, the prince of enchanters. His name is known in very many of the romances of the middle ages.

Miles, Sir, a knight who was killed by Pellinore when on his way to King Arthur's court.

Mod'red, Sir (or Mordred), the traitor, the elder brother of Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth. His story is variously related, but the narrative of Malory, with some important variations, has been mainly followed in this volume.

Pel'li nore, Sir, called also King Pellinore, the lord of the Forest Perilous. He was a knight of great size and strength, and though courteous in manner was cruel and overbearing. Notwithstanding his evil deeds he became a

knight of the Round Table and for a while sat at the King's right hand. It was he who slew King Lot; but, several years later, he himself was slain by Sir Gawain. He was nicknamed "The Knight of the Stranger Beast."

Percival, Sir. The story of this knight, as related in these stories, is based upon the metrical romance of *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach (twelfth century). Various other and quite different legends concerning Sir Percival are in existence. According to Malory he was the son of Pellinore. Still a different story is told by Tennyson.

Re pan'se, Queen, the wife of King Amfortas, and keeper of the Holy Grail.

Ry'ence, King (also spelled Rience and Ryons) was said to be ruler of Wales, Ireland, and many other islands. He refused to acknowledge King Arthur and fought against him for many years. At last, through the advice of Merlin, he was slain by two of Arthur's knights.

Sar'ras, a mythical city in the mythical land of Babylon.

Tit'u rel, priest and king, the great-grandfather of Sir Percival. He was the builder and first king of Graalburg, the castle of the Holy Grail. He is the subject of a metrical romance, *Titurel*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach (twelfth century).

Torre, Sir, the younger brother of Elaine.

Ul'fi us, Sir, an old knight who was one of the first to support King Arthur. He had previously been one of King Uther's knights.

U'riens, King, of Gore. He at first opposed King Arthur and fought against him; but afterwards he became reconciled to him and was made a knight of the Round Table. Malory relates that he married Morgan the Fay the sister of Queen Bellicent.

U'ther, King, sometimes called Pendragon, or war chief, was overlord of the Britons, having a number of petty kings and barons as his vassals. See the *Chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Most authorities agree in calling him the father of King Arthur.

Viv'ian (called also Nimue), an enchantress commonly known as the Lady of the Lake. She was fickle, foolish, and cruel, although possessing much magical power. She was the source of much trouble among the knights of the Round Table.

Ygerne (e ġern'), the wife of Gorloïs of Tintagel Castle. Her husband having been slain and his castle taken, she was forced to become the wife of King Uther. She was the mother of Bellicent and of Morgan the Fay, and also, according to many, of King Arthur.

